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Book-Length Novel:

**And Then The
Town Took Off**

by

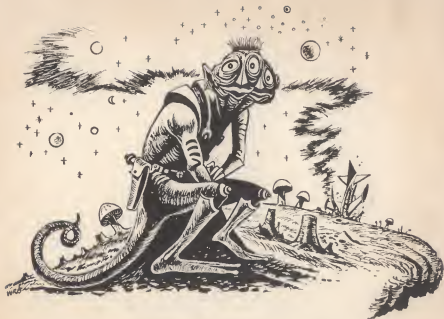
RICHARD WILSON

author of

The Girls from Planet 5

THE MAGAZINE OF TOMORROWNESS





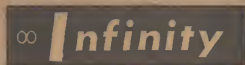
MY KINGDOM FOR A NEWSSTAND!

No joke, chums—this is a real melancholy bit. Turning Pappy's spaceyacht into spacescrap is bad enough. Missing my date with that cute Venusian ooglechick is worse. But the downest part of all is, I may not get back home in time to buy the new INFINITY and SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES!

I don't have to tell you how super INFINITY and SFA are. Or that I'll be a nowhere square without air if I miss an issue of either. Especially with the surprises they've got coming up!

But I have nobody to blame but my own self—I should have subscribed when I had the chance.

Readers, don't let this happen to you. Remember, monsters of distinction have subscriptions. See full details inside.



SCIENCE FICTION

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Vol. 3, No. 2

THE MAGAZINE OF TOMORROWNESS

Two-Part Novel:

AND THEN THE TOWN TOOK OFF . . Richard Wilson 4

Novelets:

BEYOND OUR CONTROL Randall Garrett 68

OUTSIDE SATURN Robert Ernest Gilbert 104

Stories:

LENNY Isaac Asimov 54

THE STATISTOMAT PITCH Chan Davis 92

Departments:

BY THE EDITOR 53

INFINITY'S CHOICE Damon Knight 86

FANFARE Robert Silverberg 101

FEEDBACK The Readers 125

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And Then the Town Took Off

*Up, up and awa-ay went
Superior, Ohio—on the
zaniest journey ever!*

A Book-length Novel
by RICHARD WILSON

Illustrated by ED EMSH





First of Two Parts

CHAPTER I

THE TOWN of Superior, Ohio, disappeared on the night of October 31.

A truck driver named Pierce Knaubloch was the first to report it. He had been highballing west along Route 202, making up for the time he'd spent over a second cup of coffee in a diner, when he screeched to a stop. If he'd gone another twenty-five feet, he'd have gone into the pit where Superior had been.

Knaubloch couldn't see the extent of the pit because it was

too dark, but it looked big. Bigger than if a nitro truck had blown up, which was his first thought. He backed up two hundred feet, set out flares, then sped off to a telephone.

The State Police converged on the former site of Superior from several directions. Communicating by radiophone across the vast pit, they confirmed that the town undoubtedly was missing.

They put in a call to the National Guard. The Guard surrounded the area with troops—more than a thousand were needed—to keep people from falling into the pit.

The Pennsylvania Railroad complained that one of its passenger trains was missing. The train's schedule called for it to pass through but not stop at Superior at 11:58. That seemed to fix the time of the disappearance at midnight. The truck driver had made his discovery shortly after midnight.

Someone pointed out that October 31 was Hallowe'en and that midnight was the witching hour.

Somebody else said nonsense, they'd better check for radiation. A civil defense official brought up a geiger counter, but no matter how he shook it and rapped on it, it refused to click.

A National Guard officer volunteered to take a jeep down into the pit, having found a spot that

seemed navigable. He was gone a long time but when he came out the other side he reported that the pit was concave, relatively smooth and did not smell of high explosives. He'd found no people, no houses—no sign of anything except the pit itself.

The Governor of Ohio asked Washington whether any unidentified planes had been over the state. Washington said no. The Pentagon and the Atomic Energy Commission denied that they had been conducting secret experiments.

Nor had there been any defense plants in Superior that might have blown up. The town's biggest factory made kitchen sinks and the next biggest made bubble gum.

A UNITED AIRLINES pilot found Superior early on the morning of November 1. The pilot, Captain Eric Studley, who had never seen a flying saucer and hoped never to see one, was afraid now that he had. The object loomed out of a cloudbank at twelve thousand feet and Studley changed course to avoid it. He noted with only minimum satisfaction that his co-pilot also saw the thing and wondered why it wasn't moving at the terrific speed flying saucers were allegedly capable of.

Then he saw the church steeple on it.

A few minutes later he had relayed a message from Superior, formerly of Ohio, addressed to whom it might concern:

It said that Superior had seceded from Earth.

ONE OTHER radio message came from Superior, now airborne, on that first day. A ham radio operator reported an unidentified voice as saying plainly:

"Cold up here!"

CHAPTER II

DON CORT had been dozing in what passed for the club car on the Buckeye Cannonball when the train braked to a stop. He looked out the window, hoping this was Columbus, where he planned to catch a plane east. But it wasn't Columbus. All he could see were some lanterns jogging as trainmen hurried along the tracks.

The conductor looked into the car. The redhead across the aisle in whom Don had taken a passing interest earlier in the evening asked, "Why did we stop?"

"Somebody flagged us down," the conductor said. "We don't make a station stop at Superior on this run."

The girl's hair was a subtle but false red. When Don had entered the club car he'd seen her hatless head from above and

noticed that the hair along the part was dark. Her eyes had been on a book and Don had the opportunity for a brief study of her face. The cheeks were full and untouched by makeup. There were lines at the corners of her mouth which indicated a tendency to arrange her expression into one of disapproval. The lips were full, like the cheeks, but it was obvious that the scarlet lipstick had contrived a mouth a trifle bigger than the one nature had given her.

Her glance upward then interrupted his examination, which had been about to go on to her figure. Later, though, he was able to observe that it was more than adequate.

If the girl had given Don Cort more than the glance, or if it had been a trained, all-encompassing glance, she would have seen a man in his mid-twenties—about her age—lean, tall and straight-shouldered, with ex-blond hair now verging on dark brown, a face neither handsome nor ugly and a habit of drawing the inside of his left cheek between his teeth and nibbling at it thoughtfully.

But it was likely that all she noticed then was the brief case he carried, attached by a chain to a handcuff on his left wrist.

"Will we be here long?" Don asked the conductor. He didn't want to miss his plane at Colum-

bus. The sooner he got to Washington the sooner he'd get rid of the brief case. The handcuff it was attached to was one reason why his interest in the redhead had been only passing.

"Can't say," the conductor told him. He let the door close again and went down to the tracks.

Don hesitated, shrugged at the redhead, said "Excuse me" and followed the conductor. About a dozen people were milling around the train as it sat in the dark, hissing steam. Don made his way up to the locomotive and found a bigger knot of people gathered in front of the cow-catcher.

Some sort of barricade had been put up across the tracks and it was covered with every imaginable kind of warning device. There were red lanterns, battery and electric; flashlights; road flares; and even an old red shirt.

Don saw two men who must have been the engineer and fireman talking to a bearded gentleman wearing a civil defense helmet, a topcoat and riding boots.

"You'd go over the edge, I tell you," the old gentleman was saying.

"If you don't get this junk off the line," the engineer said, "I'll plow right through it. Off the edge! You crazy or something?"

"Look for yourself," the old man in the white helmet said. "Go ahead. Look."

The engineer was exasperated. He turned to the fireman. "You look. Humor the old man. Then let's go."

The bearded man—he called himself Professor Garet—went off with the fireman. Don followed them. They had tramped a quarter of a mile along the gravel when the fireman stopped. "Okay," he said, "where's the edge? I don't see nothing." The tracks seemed to stretch forever into the darkness.

"It's another half mile or so," the professor said.

"Well, let's hurry up. We haven't got all night."

The old man chuckled. "I'm afraid you have."

They came to it at last, stopping well back from it. Professor Garet swelled with pride, it seemed, as he made a theatrical gesture.

"Behold," he said. "Something even Columbus couldn't find. The edge of the world."

True, everything seemed to stop and they could see stars shining low on the horizon where stars could not properly be expected to be seen.

Don Cort and the fireman walked cautiously toward the edge while the Professor ambled ahead with the familiarity of one who had been there before.

There was a wind and they did not venture too close. Nevertheless Don could see that it apparently was a neat, sharp edge, not one of your old ragged, random edges such as might have been caused by an explosion. This one had the feeling of design behind it.

Standing on tiptoe and repressing a touch of giddiness, Don looked over the edge. He didn't have to stand on tiptoe any more than he had to sit on the edge of his seat during the exciting part of a movie, but the situation seemed to call for it. Over the edge could be seen a big section of Ohio. At least he supposed it was Ohio.

Don looked at the fireman, who had an unbelieving expression on his face, then at the bearded old man, who was smiling and nodding.

"You see what I mean," he said. "You would have gone right over. I believe you would have had a two-mile fall."

"OF COURSE you could have stayed aboard the train," the man driving the old Pontiac said, "but I really think you'll be more comfortable at Cavalier."

Don Cort, sitting in the back seat of the car with the redhead from the club car, asked, "Cavalier?"

"The college. The institute, really; it's not accredited. What

did you say your name was, miss?"

"Jen Jervis," she said. "Geneva Jervis, formally."

"Miss Jervis. I'm Civek. You know Mr. Cort, I suppose."

The girl smiled sideways. "We have a nodding acquaintance." Don nodded and grinned.

"There's plenty of room in the dormitories," Civek said. "People don't exactly pound on the gates and scream to be admitted to Cavalier."

"Are you connected with the college?" Don asked.

"Me? No. I'm the mayor of Superior. The old town's really come up in the world, hasn't it?"

"Overnight," Geneva Jervis said. "If what Mr. Cort and the fireman say is true. I haven't seen the edge myself."

"You'll have a better chance to look at it in the morning," the mayor said, "if we don't settle back in the meantime."

"Was there any sort of explosion?" Don asked.

"No. There wasn't any sensation at all, as far as I noticed. I was watching the late show—or trying to. My house is down in a hollow and reception isn't very good, especially with old English movies. Well, all of a sudden the picture sharpened up and I could see just as plain. Then the phone rang and it was Professor Garet."

"The old fellow with the

whiskers and the riding boots?" Jen Jervis asked.

"Yes. Osbert Gareth, Professor of Magnology at the Cavalier Institute of Applied Sciences."

"Professor of what?"

"Magnology. As I say, the school isn't accredited. Well, Professor Gareth telephoned and said 'Hector'—that's my name, Hector Civek—'everything's up in the air.' Having his little joke. I said 'What?' and then he told me."

"Told you what?" Jen Jervis asked. "I mean, does he have any theory about it?"

"He has a theory about everything. I think what he was trying to convey was that this—this levitation—confirmed his Magnology principle."

"What's that?" Don asked.

"I haven't the faintest idea. I'm a politician, not a scientist. Professor Gareth went on about it for a while, on the telephone, about magnetism and gravity, but I think he was only calling as a courtesy, so the mayor wouldn't look foolish the next morning, not knowing his town had flown the coop."

"What's the population of Superior?"

"Three thousand, including the students at the Institute. Three thousand and forty, counting you people from the train. I guess you'll be with us for a while."

"What do you mean by that?" Jen Jervis asked.

"Well, I don't see how you can get down. Do you?"

"Does Superior have an airport?" Don asked. "I've got to get back to—to Earth." It sounded odd to put it that way.

"Nope," Civek said. "No airport. No place for a plane to land, either."

"Maybe not a plane," Don said, "but a helicopter could land just about anywhere."

"No helicopters here, either."

"Maybe not. But I'll bet they're swarming all over you by morning."

"Hm," said Hector Civek. Don couldn't quite catch his expression in the rear view mirror. "I suppose they could, at that. Well, here's Cavalier. You go right in that door, where the others are going. There's Professor Gareth. I've got to see him—excuse me."

The mayor was off across the campus. Don looked at Geneva Jervis, who was frowning. "Are you thinking," he asked, "that Mayor Civek was perhaps just a little less than completely honest with us?"

"I'm thinking," she said, "that I should have stayed with Aunt Hattie another night, then taken a plane to Washington."

"Washington?" Don said. "That's where I'm going. I mean where I *was* going before Supe-

rior became airborne. What do you do in Washington, Miss Jervis?"

"I work for the government. Doesn't everybody?"

"Not everybody. Me, for instance."

"No?" she said. "Judging by that satchel you're handcuffed to I'd have thought you were a courier for the Pentagon. Or maybe State."

He laughed quickly and loudly because she was getting uncomfortably close. "Oh, no. Nothing so glamorous. I'm a messenger for the Riggs National Bank, that's all. Where do you work?"

"I'm with Senator Bobby Thebold, S.O.B."

Don laughed again. "He sure is."

"*Mister Cort!*" she said, annoyed. "You know as well as I do that S.O.B. stands for Senate Office Building. I'm his secretary."

"I'm sorry. We'd better get out and find a place to sleep. It's getting late."

"*Places to sleep,*" she corrected. She looked angry.

"Of course," Don said, puzzled by her emphasis. "Come on. Where they put you, you'll probably be surrounded by co-eds, even if I could get out of this cuff."

He took her bag in his free hand and they were met by a gray-haired woman who introduced

herself as Mrs. Gareth. "We'll try to make you comfortable," she said. "What a night, eh? The professor is simply beside himself. We haven't had so much excitement since the Cosmolineator blew up."

They had a glimpse of the professor, still in his CD helmet, going around a corner, gesticulating wildly to someone wearing a white laboratory smock.

CHAPTER III

DON CORT had slept, but not well. He'd tried to fold the brief case to pull it through his sleeve so he could take his coat off but whatever was inside the brief case was too big. Cavalier had given him a room to himself at one end of a dormitory and he'd taken his pants off but had had to sleep with his coat and shirt on.

He got up, feeling gritty, and did what little dressing was necessary. It was eight o'clock, according to the watch on the unhandcuffed wrist, and things were going on. He had a view of the campus from his window. A bright sun shone on young people moving generally toward a squat building and other people going in random directions. The first were students going to breakfast, he supposed, and the others were faculty members. The air was very clear and the

long morning shadows distinct. Only then did he remember completely that he and the whole town of Superior were up in the air.

He went through the dormitory. A few students were still sleeping. The others had gone from their unmade beds. He shivered as he stepped outdoors. It was crisp, if not freezing, and his breath came out visibly. First he'd eat, he decided, so he'd be strong enough to go take a good look over the Edge, in broad daylight, to the Earth below.

The mess hall, or whatever they called it, was cafeteria style, and he got in line with a tray for juice, eggs and coffee. He saw no one he knew, but as he was looking for a table a willowy blonde girl smiled and gestured to the empty place opposite her.

"You're Mr. Cort," she said. "Won't you join me?"

"Thanks," he said, unloading his tray. "How did you know?"

"The mystery man with the handcuff. You'd be hard to miss. I'm Alis—that's A-l-i-s, not A-l-i-c-e—Garet. Are you with the FBI? Or did you escape from jail?"

"How do you do. No, just a bank messenger. What an unusual name. Professor Garet's daughter?"

"The same," she said. "Also the only. A pity, because if there'd been two of us I'd have

had a fifty-fifty chance of going to OSU. As it is, I'm duty-bound to represent the second generation at the nut factory."

"Nut factory? You mean Cavalier?" Don struggled to manipulate knife and fork without knocking things off the table with his clinging brief case.

"Here, let me cut your eggs for you," Alis said. "You'd better order them scrambled tomorrow. Yes, Cavalier. Home of the crackpot theory and the latter-day alchemist."

"I'm sure it's not that bad. Thanks. As for tomorrow, I hope to be out of here by then."

"How do you get down from an elephant? Old riddle. You don't; you get down from ducks. How do you plan to get down from Superior?"

"I'll find a way. I'm more interested at the moment in how I got up here."

"You were levitated, like everybody else."

"You make it sound deliberate, Miss Garet, as if somebody hoisted a whole patch of real estate for some fell purpose."

"Scarcely *fell*, Mr. Cort. As for it being deliberate, that seems to be a matter of opinion. Apparently you haven't seen the papers."

"I didn't know there were any."

"Actually there's only one, The Superior *Sentry*, a weekly.

This is an extra. Ed Clark must have been up all night getting it out." She opened her purse and unfolded a four-page tabloid.

Don blinked at the headline:

TOWN GETS HIGH

"Ed Clark's something of an eccentric, like everybody else in Superior," Alis said.

Don read the story, which seemed to him a capricious treatment of an apparently grave situation.

* "Residents having business beyond the outskirts of town today are advised not to. It's a long way down.

"Where yesterday Superior was surrounded by Ohio, as usual, today Superior ends literally at Town Line.

"A Citizens' Emergency Fence-Building Committee is being formed, but in the meantime all are warned to stay well away from the Edge. The law of gravity seems to have been repealed for the town but it is doubtful if the same exemption would apply to a dubious individual bent on investigating . . ."

Don skimmed the rest. "I don't see anything about it being deliberate."

Alis had been creaming and sugaring Don's coffee. She pushed it across to him and said, "It's not on page one. Ed Clark and Mayor Civek don't get along, so

you'll find the mayor's statement in a box on page three, bottom."

Don creased the paper the other way, took a sip of coffee, nodded his thanks and read:

"MAYOR CLAIMS SECESSION FROM EARTH

"Mayor Hector Civek, in a proclamation issued locally by hand and dropped to the rest of the world in a plastic shatter-proof bottle, said today that Superior had seceded from Earth. His reasons were as vague as his explanation.

"The 'reasons' include these: (1) Superior has been discriminated against by county, state and federal agencies; (2) Cavalier Institute has been held up to global derision by orthodox (presumably meaning accredited) colleges and universities; and (3) chicle exporters have conspired against the Superior Bubble Gum Company by unreasonably raising prices.

"The 'explanation' consists of a 63-page treatise on Applied Magnology by Professor Osbert Garet of Cavalier which the editor (a) does not understand, (b) lacks space to publish and which (it being atrociously handwritten), (c) he has not the temerity to ask his linotype operator to set."

Don said, "I'm beginning to like this Ed Clark."

"He's a doll," Alis said. "He's about the only one in town who stands up to Father."

"Does your father claim that *he* levitated Superior off the face of the Earth?"

"Not to me he doesn't. I'm one of those banes of his existence, a skeptic. He gave up trying to magnolize me when I was sixteen. I had a science teacher in high school—not in Superior, incidentally—who gave me all kinds of embarrassing questions to ask Father. I asked them, being a natural-born needler, and Father has disowned me intellectually ever since."

"How old are you, Miss Garet, if I may ask?"

She sat up straight and tucked her sweater tightly into her skirt, emphasizing her figure. To a male friend Don would have described the figure as outstanding. She had mocking eyes, a pert nose and a mouth of such moist red softness that it seemed perpetually waiting to be kissed. All in all she had the beauty of youth and could have been the queen of a campus much more densely populated with co-eds than Cavalier was.

"You may call me Alis," she said. "And I'm nineteen."

Don grinned. "Going on?"

"Three months past. How old are *you*, Mr. Cort?"

"Don's the name I've had for twenty-six years. Please use it."

"Gladly. And now, Don, unless you want another cup of coffee, I'll go with you to the end of the world."

"On such short notice?" Don was intrigued. Last night the red-head from the club car had repelled an advance that hadn't been made and this morning a blonde was apparently making an advance that hadn't been solicited. He wondered where Geneva Jervis was, but only vaguely.

"I'll admit the *entendre* was double," Alis said. "What I meant—for now—was that we can stroll out to where Superior used to be attached to the rest of Ohio and see how the Earth is getting along without us."

"Delighted. But don't you have any classes?"

"Sure I do. Non-Einsteinian Relativity 1, at nine o'clock. But I'm a demon class cutter, which is why I'm still a senior at my advanced age. On to the brink!"

CHAPTER IV

THEY WALKED south from the campus and came to the railroad track. The train was standing there with nowhere to go. It had been abandoned except for the conductor, who had dutifully spent the night aboard.

"What's happening?" he asked when he saw them. "Any word from down there?"

"Not that I know of," Don said. He introduced him to Alis Garet. "What are you going to do?"

"What can I do?" the conductor asked.

"You can go over to Cavalier and have breakfast," Alis said. "Nobody's going to steal your old train."

The conductor reckoned as how he might just do that, and did.

"You know," Don said, "I was half asleep last night but before the train stopped I thought it was running alongside a creek for a while."

"South Creek," Alis said. "That's right. It's just over there."

"Is it still? I mean hasn't it all poured off the Edge by now? Was that Superior's water supply?"

Alis shrugged. "All I know is you turn on the faucet and there's water. Let's go look at the creek."

They found it coursing along between the banks.

"Looks just about the same," she said.

"That's funny. Come on; let's follow it to the Edge."

The brink, as Alis called it, looked even more awesome by daylight. Everything stopped short. There were the remnants of a cornfield, with the withered stalks cut down, then there was

nothing. There was South Creek surging along, then nothing. In the distance a clump of trees, with a few autumn leaves still clinging to their branches, simply ended.

"Where is the water going?" Don asked. "I can't make it out."

"Down, I'd say. Rain for the Earthpeople."

"I should think it'd be all dried up by now. I'm going to have a look."

"Don't! You'll fall off!"

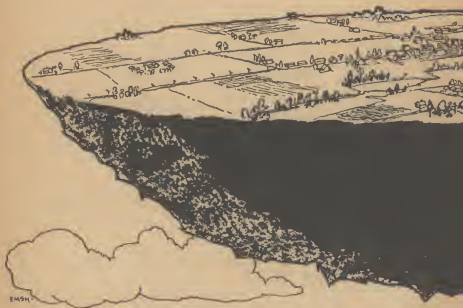
"I'll be careful." He walked cautiously toward the Edge. Alis followed him, a few feet behind. He stopped a yard from the brink and waited for a spell of dizziness to pass. The Earth was spread out like a topographer's map, far below. Don took another wary step, then sat down.

"Chicken," said Alis. She laughed uncertainly, then she sat down, too.

"I still can't see where the water goes," Don said. He stretched out on his stomach and began to inch forward. "You stay there."

Finally he had inched to a point where, by stretching out a hand, he could almost reach the Edge. He gave another wriggle and the fingers of his right hand closed over the brink. For a moment he lay there, panting.

"How do you feel?" Alis asked.



"Scared. When I get my courage back I'll pick up my head and look."

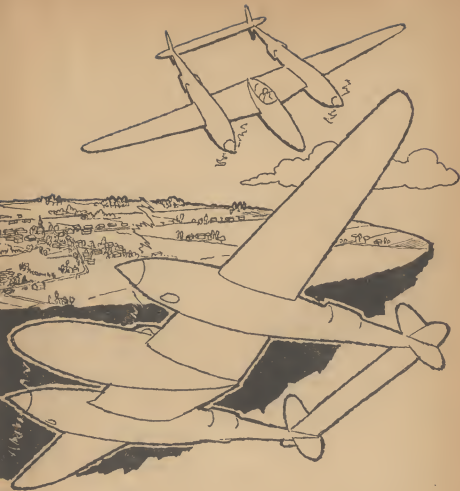
Alis put a hand out tentatively, then purposefully took hold of his ankle and held it tight. "Just in case a high wind comes along," she said.

"Thanks. It helps. Okay, here we go." He lifted his head. "Damn."

"What?"

"It still isn't clear. Do you have a pocket mirror?"

"I have a compact." She took it out of her bag with her free



hand and tossed it to him. It rolled and Don had to grab to keep it from going over the Edge. Alis gave a little shriek. Don was momentarily unnerved and had to put his head back on the ground. "Sorry," she said.

Don opened the compact and

carefully transferred it to his right hand. He held it out an inch beyond the Edge and peered into it, focusing it on the end of the creek. "Now I've got it. The water *isn't* draining away!"

"It isn't? Then where is it going?"

"Down, of course, but it's as if it's going into a well, or a vertical tunnel, a few feet below the Edge."

"Why? How?"

"I can't see too well, but that's my impression. Hold on now: I'm coming back." He inched away from the Edge, then got up and brushed himself off. He returned her compact. "I guess you know where we go next."

"The other end of the creek?"

"Exactly."

SOUTH CREEK did not bisect Superior, as Don thought it might, but flowed in an arc through a southern segment of it. They had about two miles to go, past South Creek Bridge—which used to lead to Ladenburg, Alis said—past Raleigh Country Club (a long drive would really put the ball out of play, Don thought) and on to the Edge again.

But as they approached what they were forced to consider the source of the creek, they found a wire fence at the spot. "This is new," Alis said.

The fence, which had a sign on it, WARNING—ELECTRIFIED, was semi-circular, with each end at the Edge and tarpaulins strung behind it so they could not see the mouth of the creek. The water flowed from under the tarp and fence.

"Look how it comes in spurts," Alis said.

"As if it's being pumped."

Smaller print on the sign said: *Protecting mouth of South Creek, one of two sources of water for Superior. Electrical charge in fence is sufficient to kill. Signed, Vincent Grande, Chief of Police; Hector Givex, Mayor.*

"What's the other source, besides the faucet in your bathroom?" Don asked.

"North Lake, maybe," Alis said. "People fish there but nobody's allowed to swim."

"Is the lake entirely within the town limits?"

"I don't know."

"If it were on the Edge, and if I took a rowboat out on it, I wonder what would happen?"

"I know one thing—I wouldn't be there holding your ankle while you found out."

She took his arm as they gazed past the electrified fence at the Earth below and to the west.

"It's impressive, isn't it?" she said. "I wonder if that's Indiana way over there?"

He patted her hand absent-mindedly. "I wonder if it's west at all. I mean, how do we know Superior is maintaining the same position up here as it used to down there?"

"We could tell by the sun, silly."

"Of course," he said, grinning at his stupidity. "And I guess

we're not high enough to see very far. If we were we'd be able to see the Great Lakes—or Lake Erie, anyway."

They were musing about the geography when a plane came out of a cloudbank and, a second later, veered sharply. They could make out UAL on the underside of a wing. As it turned they imagined they could see faces peering out of the windows. They waved and thought they saw one or two people wave back. Then the plane climbed toward the east and was gone.

"Well," Don said as they turned to go back to Cavalier, "now we know that they know. Maybe we'll begin to get some answers. Or, if not answers, then transportation."

"Transportation?" Alis squeezed the arm she was holding. "Why? Don't you like it here?"

"If you mean don't I like you, the answer is yes, of course I do. But if I don't get out of this handcuff soon so I can take a bath and get into clean clothes you're not going to like me."

"You're still quite acceptable, if a bit whiskery." She stopped, still holding his arm, and he turned so they were face to face. "So kiss me," she said, "before you deteriorate."

They were in the midst of an extremely pleasant kiss when the brief case at the end of Don's handcuff began to talk to him.

CHAPTER V

MUCH of the rest of the world was inclined to regard the elevation of Superior, Ohio, as a Fortean phenomenon in the same category as flying saucers and sea monsters.

The press had a field day. The headlines were whimsical.

TOWN TAKES OFF SUPERIOR LIVES UP TO NAME A RISING COMMUNITY

The city council of Superior, Wisconsin, passed a resolution urging its Ohio namesake to come back down. The Superiors in Nebraska, Wyoming, Arizona and West Virginia, glad to have the publicity, added their voices to the plea.

The Pennsylvania Railroad filed a suit demanding that the State of Ohio return forthwith one train and five miles of right-of-way.

The price of bubble gum went up from one cent to three for a nickel.

In Parliament a Labour member rose to ask the Home Secretary for assurances that all British cities were firmly fastened down.

An Ohio waterworks put in a bid for the sixteen square miles of hole that Superior had left behind, explaining that it would make a fine reservoir.

A company that leased out big advertising signs in Times Square offered Superior a quarter of a million dollars for exclusive rights to advertising space on its bottom, or Earthward, side. It sent the offer by air mail, leaving delivery up to the post office.

In Washington Senator Bobby Thebold ascertained that his red-haired secretary, Jen Jervis, had been aboard the train levitated with Superior and registered a series of complaints by telephone, starting with the Interstate Commerce Commission and the railroad brotherhoods. He asked the FBI to investigate the possibility of kidnaping and muttered about the likelihood of it all being a Communist plot.

A little-known congressman from Ohio started a rumor that the raising of Superior was an experiment connected with the United States Earth Satellite program. The National Science Foundation issued a quick denial.

TWO MEN talked earnestly in an efficient-looking room at the end of one of the more intricate mazes in the Pentagon Building. Neither wore a uniform but the younger man called the other Sir, or Chief, or General.

"We've established definitely that Sergeant Cort was on that train, have we?" the general asked.

"Yes, sir. No doubt about it."

"And he has the item with him?"

"He must have. The only keys are here and at the other end. He couldn't open the handcuff or the brief case."

"The only known keys, that is."

"Oh? How's that, General?"

"The sergeant can open the brief case and use the item if we tell him how."

"You think it's time to use it? I thought we were saving it."

"That was before Superior defected. Now we can use it to more advantage than any theoretical use it might be put to in the foreseeable future."

"We could evacuate Cort. Take him off in a helicopter or drop him a parachute and let him jump."

"No. Having him there is a piece of luck. No one knows who he is. We'll assign him there for the duration and have him report regularly. Let's go to the message center."

SENATOR BOBBY THEBOLD was an imposing six-feet-two, a muscular 195, a youthful-looking 43. He wore his steel-gray hair cut short and his skin was tan the year round. He was a bachelor. He had been a fighter pilot in World War II and his conversation was peppered with air force slang, much of it out of date.

Thebold was good newspaper copy and one segment of the press, admiring his fighting ways, had dubbed him Bobby the Bold. The Senator did not mind a bit.

At the moment Senator Thebold was pacing the carpet in the ample working space he'd fought to acquire in the Senate Office Building. He was momentarily at a loss. His inquiries about Jen Jervis had elicited no satisfaction from the ICC, the FBI, or the CIA. He was in an alphabetical train of thought and went on to consider the CAA, the CAB and the CAP. He snapped his fingers at CAP. He had it.

The Civil Air Patrol itself he considered a la-de-da outfit of gentleman flyers, skittering around in light planes, admittedly doing some good, but by and large nothing to excite a former P-38 pilot who'd won a chestful of ribbons for action in the Southwest Pacific.

Ah, but the PP. There was an organization! Bobby Thebold had been one of the founders of the Private Pilots, a hard-flying outfit that zoomed into the wild blue yonder on weekends and holidays, engines roar, propellers aglint, white silk scarves aflap. PP's members were wealthy industrialists, stunt flyers, sportsmen—the elite of the air.

PP was a paramilitary organization with the rank of its officers patterned after the Royal Air

Force. Thus Bobby Thebold, by virtue of his war record, his charter membership and his national eminence, was Wing Commander Thebold, DFC.

Wing Commander Thebold swung into action. He barked into the intercom: "Miss Riley! Get the airport. Have them rev up *Charger*. Tell them I'll be there for o-nine-fifty-eight take-off. Ten-hundred will do. And get my car."

Charger was Bobby the Bold's war surplus P-38 Lightning, a sleek, twin-boomed two-engine fighter plane restored to its gleaming, paintless aluminum. Actually it was an unarmed photo-reconnaissance version of the famous warhorse of the Pacific, a fact the Wing Commander preferred to ignore. In compensation, he belted on a .45 whenever he climbed into the cockpit.

Thebold got onto Operations in PP's midwestern headquarters in Chicago. He barked, long distance:

"Jack Perley? Group Captain Perley, that is? Bobby; that's right. Wing Commander Thebold now. We've got a mission, Jack. Scramble Blue Squadron. What? Of course you can; this is an emergency. We'll rendezvous north of Columbus—I'll give you the exact grid in half an hour, when I'm airborne. Can do? Good-o! ETA? Eleven-

twenty EST. Well, maybe that is optimistic, but I hate to see the day slipping by. Make it eleven forty-five. What? Objective? Objective Superior! Got it? Okay—roger!”

Wing Commander Bobby Thebold took his Lindbergh-style helmet and goggles from a desk drawer, caressing the limp leather fondly, and put them in a dispatch case. He gave a soft salute to the door behind which Jen Jervis customarily worked, more as his second-in-command than his secretary, and said half aloud:

“Okay, Jen, we’re coming to get you.”

He didn’t know quite how, but Bobby the Bold and *Charger* would soon be on their way.

CHAPTER VI

DON CORT regretfully detached himself from Alis Garet. “What was that?” he said.

“That was me—Alis the love-starved. You could be a bit more gallant. Even ‘How was that?’, though corny, would have been preferable.”

“No—I mean I thought I heard a voice. Didn’t you hear anything?”

“To be perfectly frank—and I say it with some pique—I was totally absorbed. Obviously you weren’t.”

“It was very nice.” The countryside, from the Edge with its

fenced-in mouth of the creek to the golf course, was deserted.

“Well, thanks. Thanks a bunch. Such enthusiasm is more than I can bear. I have to go now. There’s an eleven o’clock class in Magnetic Flux that I’m simply dying to audit.”

She gave her shoulder-length blonde hair a toss and started back. Don hesitated, looked suspiciously at the brief case dangling from his wrist, shook his head, then followed her. The voice, wherever it came from, had not spoken again.

“Don’t be angry, Alis.” He fell into step on her left and took her arm with his free hand. “It’s just that everything is so crazy and nobody seems to be taking it seriously. A town doesn’t just get up and take off, and yet nobody up here seems terribly concerned.”

Alis squeezed the hand that held her arm, mollified. “You’ve got lipstick on your whiskers.”

“Good. I’ll never shave again.”

“Ah,” she laughed, “gallantry at last. I’ll tell you what let’s do. We’ll go see Ed Clark, the editor of the *Sentry*. Maybe he’ll give you some intelligent conversation.”

The newspaper office was in a ramshackle one-story building on Lyric Avenue, a block off Broadway, Superior’s main street. It was in an ordinary store front whose windows displayed various

ancient stand-up cardboard posters calling attention to a church supper, a state fair, an auto race and a movie starring H. B. Warner. A dust-covered banner urged the election as president of Alfred E. Smith.

There was no one in the front of the shop. Alis led Don to the rear where a tall skinny man with straggly gray hair in a semi-circle around a bald head was setting type.

"Good morning, Mr. Clark," she said. "What's that you're setting—an anti-Hoover handbill?"

"Hello, Al. How are you this fine altitudinous day?"

"Super. Or should it be supra? I want you to meet Don Cort. Don, Mr. Clark."

The men shook hands and Clark looked curiously at Don's handcuff.

"It's my theory he's an embezzler," Alis said, "and he's made this his getaway town."

"As a matter of fact," Don said, "the Riggs National Bank will be worried if I don't get in touch with them soon. I guess you'd know, Mr. Clark—is there any communication at all out of town?" By prearrangement, a message from Don to Riggs would have been forwarded to military intelligence.

"I don't know of any, except for the Civek method—a bottle tossed over the Edge. The telegraph and telephone lines are

cut, of course. There is a radio station in town, WCAV, operated from the campus, but it's been silent ever since the great severance. At least nothing local has come over my old Atwater Kent."

"Isn't anybody *doing* anything?" Don asked.

"Sure," Clark said. "I'm getting out my paper—there was even an extra this morning—and doing job printing. The job is for a jeweler in Ladenburg and I don't know how I'll deliver it, but no one's told me to stop so I'm doing it. I guess everybody's carrying on pretty much as before."

"That's what I mean. Business as usual. But how about the people who do business out of town? What's Western Union doing, for instance, and trucking companies? And the factories? You have two factories, I understand, and pretty soon there's going to be a mighty big surplus of kitchen sinks and chewing gum."

"You two go on settling our fate," Alis said. "I'd better get back to school. Look me up later, Don." She waved and went out.

"Fine girl, that Alis," Clark said. "Got her old man's gump-tion without his nutty streak. To answer your question, the Western Union man here is catching up on his bookkeeping and accepting outgoing messages contingent on restoration of service. The sink factory made a ship-

ment two days ago and won't have another ready till next week, so they're carrying on. They have enough raw material for a month. I was planning to visit the bubble gum people this afternoon to see how they're doing. Maybe you'd like to come."

"Yes, I would. I still chew it once in a while, on the sly."

Clark grinned. "I won't tell. Would you like to tidy up, Don? There's a washroom out back, with a razor and some mysterious running water. Now *there's* a phenomenon I'd like to get to the bottom of."

"Thanks. I'll shave with it now and worry about its source later. Do you think Professor Garet and his Magnology cult has anything to do with it?"

"He'd like to think so, I'm sure." Clark shrugged. "We've been airborne less than twelve hours. I guess the answers will come in time. You go clean up and I'll get back to my job."

Don felt better when he had shaved. It had been awkward because he hadn't been able to take off his coat or shirt, but he'd managed. He was drying his face when the voice came again. This time there was no doubt it came from the brief case chained to his handcuff.

"Are you alone now?" it asked.

Startled, Don said, "Yes."

"Good. Speak closer to the

brief case so we won't be overheard. This is Captain Simmons, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

"Take out your ID card. Separate the two pieces of plastic. There's a flat plastic key next to the card. Open the brief case lock with it."

The voice was silent until Don, with the help of a razor blade, had done as he was directed. "All right, sir; that's done."

"Open the brief case, take out the package, open the package and put the wrappings back in the briefcase."

Again the voice stopped. Don unwrapped something that looked like a flat cigarette case with two appendages, one a disk of perforated hard rubber the size of a half dollar and the other a three-quarter-inch-wide ribbon of opaque plastic. "I've got it, sir."

"Good. What you see is a highly advanced radio transmitter and receiver. You can imagine its value in the field. It's a pilot model you were bringing back from the contractor for tests here. But this seems as useful a way to test it as any other."

"It's range is fantastic, Captain—if you're in Washington."

"I am. Now. The key also unlocks the handcuff. Unlock it. Strip to the waist. Bend the plastic strip to fit over your shoulder—either one, as you choose. Arrange the perforated disk so

it's at the base of your neck, under your shirt collar. The thing that looks like a cigarette case is the power pack."

Don followed the instructions, rubbing his wrist in relief as the handcuff came off. The radio had been well designed and its components went into place as if they had been built to his measure. They tickled a little on his bare skin, that was all. The power pack was surprisingly light.

"That's done, sir," Don said.

The answer came softly. "So I hear. You almost blasted my ear off. From now on, when you speak to me, or whoever's at this end, a barely audible murmur will be sufficient. Try it."

"Yes, Captain," Don whispered. "I'm trying it now."

"Don't whisper. I can hear you all right, but so could people you wouldn't want overhearing at your end. A whisper carries farther than you think. Talk low."

Don practiced while he put his shirt, tie and coat back on.

"Good," Captain Simmons said. "Practice talking without moving your lips, for occasions when you might have to transmit to us in someone's view. Now put your handcuff back on and lock it."

"Oh, damn," Don said under his breath.

"I heard that."

"Sorry, sir, but it is a nuisance."

"I know, but you have to get rid of it logically. When you get a chance go to the local bank. It's the Superior State Bank on McEntee Street. Show them your credentials from Riggs National and ask them to keep your brief case in their vault. Get a receipt. Then, at your first opportunity, burn the plastic key and your ID card."

"Yes, sir."

"Keep up your masquerade as a bank messenger and try to find out, as if you were an ordinary curiosity-seeker, all you can about Cavalier Institute. You've made a good start with the Garett girl. Get to know her father."

"Yes, sir." Don realized with embarrassment that his little romantic interlude with Alis must have been eavesdropped on. "Are there any particular times I'm to report?"

"You will be reporting constantly. That's the beauty of this radio."

"You mean I can't turn it off? I won't have any privacy? There'll always be somebody listening?"

"Exactly. But you mustn't be inhibited. Your private life is still your own and no one will criticize. Your unofficial actions will simply be ignored."

"Oh, great!"

"You must rely on our discretion, Sergeant. I'm sure you'll get used to it. Enough of this for

now. We mustn't excite Clark's suspicions. Go back to him now and carry on. You'll receive further instructions as they are necessary. And remember—don't be inhibited."

"No, sir," Don said ruefully. He went back to the printshop, feeling like a goldfish bowl.

CHAPTER VII

ED CLARK took Don to the Superior State Bank and introduced him to the president, who was delighted to do business with a representative of Riggs National of Washington, D. C. Don told him nothing about the contents of the brief case but the banker seemed to be under the impression they were securities or maybe even a million dollars cash, and Don said nothing to spoil his pleasure.

Outside again, with the receipt in his wallet, Don stood with Clark on the corner of McEntee Street and Broadway.

"This is the heart of town, you might say," the newspaper editor said. "The bubble gum factory is over that way, on the railroad spur. Maybe you can smell it. Smells real nice, I think."

Don rubbed the wrist that had been manacled for so long. He was sniffing politely when there was a roar of engines and a squadron of fighter planes buzzed Broadway.

They screamed over at little more than roof level, then were gone. They were overhead so briefly that Don noticed only that they were P-38s, at least four of them.

"Things are beginning to happen," Don said. "The Air Force is having a look-see."

Clark shook his head. "That wasn't the Air Force. Those were the PP boys. They're the only ones who fly those Lightnings these days."

"PP?"

"Private Pilots. Bobby the Bold's airborne vigilantes. Wonder what they're up to?"

"Oh, Senator Bobby Thebold, S.O.B."

"If you want to put it that way, yes."

"It's a private joke. But I think I know what they're up to—or why. The Senator's secretary is marooned up here, like me. She was on the train, too."

"You don't say! I got scooped on that one. Which one is she?"

"The redhead. Geneva Jarvis. I haven't seen her since last night, come to think of it."

The P-38s screamed over again, this time from west to east. Don counted six planes now and made out the PP markings. People had come out of stores and business buildings and were looking out of upstairs windows at the sky. They were rewarded by a third thundering flypast of

the fighter planes. They were higher this time, spread out laterally as if to search maximum terrain.

"Big deal," Clark said. "This show would bring anyone outdoors, but even if they see her what do you suppose they can do about it? There's no place in town flat enough for a Piper Cub to land, let alone a fighter plane."

"How about the golf course?"

"Raleigh? Worst set of links in the whole United States. A helicopter could put down there, but that's about all. What's old Bobby so worked up about, I wonder? Unless there's something to that gossip about this Jervis girl being his mistress and he's showing off for her."

"He'd show off for anybody, they tell me," Don said. Then he remembered that military intelligence was listening in. If any pro-Thebold people were among his eavesdroppers, he hoped they respected his private right to be anti-Thebold.

At that moment he and Clark were thrown against the side of the bank building. They clung to each other and Don noticed that the sun had moved a few degrees in the sky.

"Oh-oh," Clark grunted. "Superior's taking evasive action. Thinks it's being attacked." As they regained their footing he asked, "Do you feel heavy in the legs?"

"Yes. As if I were going up in an express elevator."

"Exactly. Somebody's getting us up beyond the reach of these pesky planes, I'd guess."

The P-38s were overhead again but now they seemed to be diving on the town. More likely, if Clark's theory were right, it was an illusion—the planes were flying level but the town was rising fast.

"They'd better climb," Don said, "or they'll crash!"

There was the sound of a crash almost immediately, from the south end of town. Don and Clark ran toward it, fighting the heaviness in their legs.

A dozen others were ahead of them, running sluggishly across South Creek Bridge. Beyond, just short of the Edge, was the wreckage of a fighter plane and behind it the torn-up ground of a crash landing. There was no fire.

The pilot struggled out of the cockpit. He dropped to the ground, felt himself to see if any bones were broken, then saw the crowd running toward him.

The pilot hesitated, then ran toward the Edge. Shouts came from the crowd. With a last glance over his shoulder the pilot leaped and went over the Edge.

The crowd, Don and Clark among them, approached more cautiously. They made out a falling dot and, a second later, saw

a parachute blossom open. The other planes appeared and flew a wide protective circle around the chutist.

"Do you think that's Bobby Thebold?" Don asked.

"Probably not. That was the last plane in the formation. Thebold would be the leader."

They went back past the crashed plane, surrounded by a growing crowd from town, and recrossed the bridge.

"Look at the water," the editor said. "Ice is forming."

"And we're still rising," Don said, "if my legs are any judge. Do you think there's a connection?"

Clark shrugged. He turned up his coat collar and rubbed his hands. "All I know is the higher we go the colder we get. Come on back to the shop and warm up."

They turned at the sound of engines. Two of the five remaining P-38s had detached themselves from their cover of the chutist and were flying around the rim of Superior—as if unwilling to risk another flight across the surface of the town that seemed determined to become a satellite of Earth.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN DON CORT reached the campus he was shivering, in spite of the sweater and

topcoat Ed Clark had lent him. He asked a student where the administration building was and at the desk inquired for Professor Gareth.

A gray-haired, dedicated-looking woman told him impatiently that Professor Gareth was in his laboratory and couldn't be disturbed. She wouldn't tell him where the laboratory was.

"Have you seen Miss Jarvis?" Don wondered whether the redhead appreciated the demonstration her boss, the flying senator, had put on for her.

The woman behind the desk shook her head. "You're two of the people from the train, aren't you? Well, you're all supposed to report in the dining room at two o'clock."

"What for?"

"You'll find out at two o'clock."

It was obvious he would get no more information from her. Don left the building. It was half-past one. He crossed the near-deserted campus. His legs still felt heavy and he assumed Superior was still rising. It certainly seemed to be getting increasingly colder.

He wondered how high they were and whether it would snow. He hoped not. How high did you have to be before you got up where it didn't snow any more? He had no idea. He did recall that Mount Everest was 29,000

feet up and that it snowed up there. Or would it be *down* there, relatively speaking? How high could they be, and didn't anybody care?

The frosty old receptionist seemed to be typical in her business-as-usual, come-what-may attitude. Even Ed Clark didn't seem as concerned as he ought to be about Superior's ascent into the stratosphere. Clark was interested, certainly, but he'd given Don the impression that he was no more curious than he would be about any other phenomenon he'd write about in next week's paper—a two-headed calf, for instance.

Don remembered now that the conquerors of Everest had needed oxygen in the rarified atmosphere near the summit and he experimentally took a couple of deep breaths. No difficulty. Therefore they weren't 29,000 feet up—yet. Small comfort, he thought as he shivered again.

He picked out a building at random. Classes were in session behind the closed but windowed doors along the hall. From the third door he saw Alis Garet, sitting at the back of one of the small classrooms. Her attention had wandered from the instructor and when she saw Don she smiled and beckoned. He hesitated, then opened the door and went in as quietly as he could. The instructor paused briefly,

nodded, then went back to a droning lecture. It seemed to be an English literature class.

Alis cleared some books off a chair next to her and Don sat down. "Who turned you loose?" she whispered.

He realized she was referring to his de-handcuffed wrist and grinned, indicating that he'd tell her later.

"I see you've been outfitted for our new climate," she went on. A student in the row of chairs ahead turned and frowned. The instructor talked on, oblivious.

Don nodded and said, "Shh."

"Don't let them intimidate you. Did you see the planes?"

More students were turning and glaring and Don's embarrassment grew. "Come on," he said. "Let's cut this class."

"Bravo!" she said. "Spoken like a true Cavalier."

She gathered up her books. The instructor, without interrupting his lecture, followed them with his eyes as they left the room. "Now I'll never know whether the young princess got out of the tower alive," she said.

"They didn't. The question is, will we?"

"I certainly hope so. I'll have to speak to Father about it."

"He's locked up in his lab, they tell me. Where would that be?"

"In the tower, as a matter of

fact. The bell tower that the founding fathers built and then didn't have enough money to buy bells for. But you can't go up there—it's the holy of holies."

"Can you?"

"No. Why? You don't think Father is making all this happen, do you?"

"Somebody is. Professor Gareth seems as good a suspect as any."

"Oh, he likes to act mysterious, but it's all an act. Poor old Father is just a crackpot theorist. I told you that. He couldn't pick up steel filings with a magnet."

"I wonder. Look, somebody's called a meeting for us outsiders from the train at two o'clock. It's almost that now. Maybe I'll have a chance to ask some questions. Will your father be there?"

"I'm sure he will. He's a great meeting-caller. I'll go with you. And, since you have two free hands now, you can hold my books. Maybe later you'll get a chance to hold me."

AMONG THE PEOPLE sitting around the bare tables in the dining room Don recognized the conductor and other trainmen, two stocky individuals who had the look of traveling salesmen, an elderly couple who held hands, a young couple with a baby, two nuns, a soldier apparently going or returning from

furlough and a tall, hawk-nosed man Don classified on no evidence at all as a Shakespearean actor. All had been on the train. He didn't see Geneva Jervis anywhere.

An improvised speakers' table had been set up at one end of the room, near the door to the kitchen. A heavy-set man sat at the table talking to Mrs. Gareth, the professor's wife.

"The stoutish gentleman next to Mother is the president of Cavalier," Alis said. "Maynard Rubach. When you talk to him be sure to call him *Doctor* Rubach. He's not a Ph.D. and he's sensitive about it, but he did used to be a veterinarian."

They sat down near the big table and Mrs. Gareth smiled and waved at them. Mayor Civek came in through the kitchen door, licking a finger as if he'd been sampling something on the way, and sat next to Mrs. Gareth.

At that moment Don's stomach gave a hop and he felt blood rushing to his head. Others also had pained or nauseous looks.

"Ugh," Alis said. "Now what?"

"I'd guess," Don said when his stomach had settled back in place, "that we've stopped rising."

"You mean we've gone as high as we're going to go?"

"I hope so. We'd run out of air if we went much higher."

Professor Garet came in presently, looking pleased with himself. He nodded to his wife and the men next to her and cleared his throat as he looked out over the room.

"Altitude 21,500 feet," he announced without preamble. "Temperature 16 degrees Fahrenheit. From here on out—" he paused, repeated "out" and chuckled—"it's going to be a bit chilly. Those of you who are inadequately clothed will see my wife for extra garments. I believe you have been comfortably housed and fed. There will, of course, be no charge for these services while you are the guests of the Cavalier Institute of Applied Sciences. Thank you. I now present Mr. Hector Civek, the mayor of Superior, who will answer any other questions you may have."

Don looked at Alis, who shrugged. The conductor stood and opened a notebook which he consulted. "I have a few questions, Mr. Mayor. These people have asked me to speak for them and there's one question that outweighs all the others. That is—are you going to take us back to Earth? If so, when? And how?"

Civek cleared his throat. He took a sip of water. "As for the first question—we certainly hope to take you and ourselves back to Earth. I can't answer the others."

"You hope to?"

"Earnestly. I turn blue easily myself and I'm as anxious as you are to get back. But when that will be depends entirely on circumstances. Circumstances, uh, beyond my control."

"Who's controlling them, then? Your friend with the whiskers?"

Professor Garet smiled amiably and patted his beard. The portly Maynard Rubach got up and Civek sat down.

"I am Dr. Maynard Rubach, president of Cavalier. I must insist that in common decency we all refrain from personal references. Mr. Civek has done his best to give you an explanation but of course he is a layman and, while he has many excellent qualities, we cannot expect him to be conversant with the principles of science. I will therefore attempt to explain.

"As you know, science has been aware for hundreds of years that the Earth is a giant magnet . . ."

Don saw Geneva Jervis. She was at the kitchen door beyond the speakers' table.

". . . the isogenic and the isoclinic . . ."

The red-haired Miss Jervis saw Don now and put her finger to her lips.

". . . an ultimote, which is simultaneously an integral part of . . ."

NOW THE REDHEAD was beckoning to him urgently. He excused himself to Alis, who frowned when she saw the other girl, then went back of the speakers' table ("... 1,257 tenescopes to the square centimeter...") into the kitchen. Jen Jarvis was by now at the far end of it, motioning him to hurry up.

"I've found something," she said. She was wearing a shapeless fur coat, apparently borrowed.

"What?"

"Come on; you'll see it."

"All right, but why me?"

"Aside from myself you seem to be the only one from the train with any gumption. I know you've been spying around doing things while everybody else sat back and waited for deliverance. Though I can't say I admire your choice of companions. That tawdry blonde—"

"Now, really, Miss Jarvis!"

"Tawny, then; sometimes I mix up my words."

"I'll bet."

She led him out the back door and across the frozen ground past several buildings. They reached what once must have been an athletic field.

"At the far end," she said. "Come on."

"Where were you when your boyfriend and his daredevil aces came over?"

"I saw them."

"Did they see you?"

"None of your business." He shrugged. They were at a section of the grandstand at the end of the field. Jen Jarvis indicated a door and Don opened it. It led to a big room under the stands. "What does this remind you of?" she asked.

Don looked blank. In the dim light he could see some planking, a long-deflated football, ancient peanut shells and an empty pint bottle. "I don't know. What?"

"Stagg Field? At the University of Chicago? Under the stands where they first made an atomic pile work?" She looked at him with the air of an investigator hot on the scent.

He shrugged. "Never been there. So what?"

"It's a pattern. This is where they've hidden their secret."

"It looks more like the place a co-ed and her boyfriends might go to have a little fun. In warmer weather, of course."

"Oh!" she said. "You're disgusting! Look over there."

He looked, wondering what made this young, attractive woman hypersensitive on the subject of sex. This was the second time she'd blazed up over nothing. What he saw where she pointed was a door at a 45-degree angle to the ground, set into a triangular block of concrete. "Where does that go?"

"Down," she said as they walked toward it. "And there's some machinery or something down there. I heard it. Or maybe I only felt the vibrations. It throbs, anyway."

"Probably the generator for the school's lighting system. Did you go down and look?"

"No."

"All right, then." He opened the door. "Down we go."

At the bottom of a flight of steps there was a corridor lit by dim electric light bulbs along one wall. The corridor became a tunnel, sloping gradually downward. They had been going north, Don judged, but then the tunnel made a right turn and now they were following it due east. "I don't hear any throbbing," he said.

"Well, I did, and from way up here. They must have turned it off."

"How long ago was that?"

"An hour, maybe."

"While we were still rising. That would make sense. We've stopped again, you know. Professor Garet gave us a bulletin on it."

He had been going ahead of her in the narrow tunnel. Now it widened and they were able to walk side by side. There seemed to be no end to it. But then they came to a sturdy-looking door, padlocked.

"That's that," Don said.

"That's that nothing," she said. "Break it down."

He laughed. "You flatter me. Come on back."

"Don't you think this is at all peculiar? A tunnel starting under an abandoned grandstand, running all this way and ending in a locked door?"

"Maybe this was a station on the underground railway. It looks old enough."

"We're going through that door." She opened her purse and took out a key ring. On it was an extensive collection of keys. Eventually she found one that opened the padlock.

"Well!" he said. "Who taught you *that*?"

"Open the door."

The corridor beyond the door was lined—walls, ceiling and floor—with a silvery metal. It continued east a hundred yards or so, swung north and then went east again, widening all the time.

It ended in a great room whose far wall was glass or some equally transparent substance. The room was a huge observatory at the end of Superior but below its rim. They could look down from it, not without a touch of nausea, to the Earth four miles below.

Don, thinking of the surface of Superior above, thought it was as if they were looking out of the gondola slung beneath a dirigible.

Or from one of the lower portholes in a giant flying saucer.

CHAPTER IX

THERE WERE clouds below that occasionally hid the Earth from sight. For a minute or more they gazed in silence at the magnificent view.

"This wasn't built in a day," Jen Jervis said at last.

"I should say not," Don agreed. "Millions of years."

She looked at him sharply. "I wasn't talking about the age of the Earth. I mean this room—this lookout post—whatever it is."

He grinned at her. "I agree with you there, too. I'm really a very agreeable fellow, Miss Jervis. Obviously whoever built it knew well in advance that Superior was going to take off. They also knew how much of it was going up and exactly where this would have to be built so it would be at the edge."

"Under the edge, you mean, with a downward view."

"That's right. From a distance I'd say Superior looked as if someone had cut the end off an orange. The flat part—where the cut was made—is the surface and we're looking out from a piece of the convex skin."

"You put things so simply, Mr. Cort, that even a child

could understand," she said acidly.

"Thank you," he said complacently. He had remembered that whoever was listening in for military intelligence through the tiny radio under his shirt could have only a vague idea of what was going on. Any little word pictures he could supply, therefore, would help them understand. He had to risk the fact that his companion might think him a bit of an idiot.

Of course with this Geneva Jervis it was easy to lay himself open to the scathing comment and the barbed retort. He imagined she was extremely useful in her role as Girl Friday to Senator Bobby Thebold.

"I don't think this is the work of those boobies at the booby hatch," she was saying.

"I beg your pardon?"

"The Cavalier Institution of Applied Foolishness, whatever they call it. They just wouldn't be capable of an undertaking of this scope."

"Oh, I agree. That's why I let you drag me away from the meeting. It was a lot of pseudo-scientific malarky. Old Doc Rubach, D.V.M., was going on about the ultimote being connecta to the thighbone, way up in the middle of the air. Tell me, who do *you* think is behind it all?"

She was walking around the



big glass-sided room as if taking mental inventory. There wasn't much to catalogue—six straight chairs, heavy and modern-looking, with a large wooden table, a framed piece of dark glass that might be a television set, and a gray steel box about the size and shape of a three-drawer filing cabinet. This last was near the big wall-window and had three black buttons on its otherwise smooth top. Don itched to push the buttons to see what would happen. Jen Jervis seemed to have the same urge. She drummed on the box with her long fingernails.

"I?" she said. "Behind it all?"

"Yes. What's your theory? Is this something for the Un-Earthly Activities Committee to investigate?"

"Don't be impertinent. If the Senator thinks it's his duty to look into it, he will. He undoubtedly is already. In the meantime I can do no less than gather whatever information I can, while I'm on the scene."

"Very patriotic. What do you conclude from your information-gathering so far?"

"Obviously there's some kind of conspiracy . . ." she began, then stopped as if she suspected a trap.

". . . afoot," Don said with a grin. "As I see it, all you do is have Bobby the Bold subpoena everybody up here—every last

man-jack of 'em—to testify before his committee. They wouldn't dare refuse."

"I don't find you a bit amusing, Mr. Cort, though I have no doubt this sophomoric humor makes a big hit with your teenage blonde. We'd better get back. I can see it was a mistake to expect any cooperation from you."

"As you like, Madame Investigator." Don gave her a mock bow, then turned for a last look down at the vast segment of Earth below.

Geneva Jervis screamed.

He whirled to see her standing, big-eyed and open-mouthed, in front of the framed dark glass he had taken for a television screen. Her face was contorted in horror and as Don's gaze flicked to the screen he had the barest glimpse of a pair of eyes fading with a dissolving image. Then the screen was blank and Don wasn't sure whether there had been a face to go with the eyes—an inhuman, unearthly face—or whether his imagination had supplied it.

The girl slumped to the floor in a faint.

CHAPTER X

COLUMBUS, OHIO, Nov. 1 (AP)—Sen. Robert (Bobby) Thebold landed here today after leading his Private Pilots (PP) squadron of P-38s on a

reconnaissance flight which resulted in the loss of one of the six World War II fighters in a crash landing on the mysteriously airborne town of Superior, Ohio. The pilot of the crashed plane parachuted safely to Earth.

Sen. Thebold told reporters grimly:

"There is no doubt in my mind that mysterious forces are at work when a town of 3,000 population can rise in a body off the face of the Earth. My reconnaissance has shown conclusively that the town is intact and its inhabitants alive. On one of my passes I saw my secretary, Miss Geneva Jarvis."

Sen. Thebold said he was confident Miss Jarvis would contact him the moment she had anything to report, indicating she would make an on-the-spot investigation.

The Senator said in reply to a question that he was "amazed" at official Washington's "complete inaction" in the matter and declared he would demand a probe by the Senate Investigations Subcommittee, of which he is a member. He indicated witnesses might include officials of the Defense Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and "possibly others."

LADENBURG, OHIO, Nov. 1 (INS)—Little Ladenburg, former neighbor of "The City in

the Sky," complained today of a rain of empty beer cans and other rubbish, apparently being tossed over the edge by residents of airborne Superior.

"They're not so high and mighty," one sanitation official here said, "that they can make Ladenburg their garbage dump."

WASHINGTON, Nov. 1 (Reuters)—American officials today were at a loss to explain the strange behaviour of Superior, Ohio, "the town that took off."

Authoritative sources assured Reuters that no military or scientific experiments were in progress which could account for the phenomenon of a town being lifted intact thousands of feet into the air.

Rumours circulating to the effect that a "Communist plot" was at work were greeted with extreme scepticism in official quarters.

WASHINGTON, 1^{er} Novembre (AFP)—Les États-Unis sont aujourd'hui le siège d'un phénomène digne d'un roman de Jules Verne. La petite ville de Superior, dans l'Ohio, s'est détachée du reste du pays et se trouve suspendue dans les airs, sans aucun support, à plusieurs milliers de mètres au-dessus de son site primitif.

Cet événement mystérieux reste sans explication de la part

dû département de la défense, de la Commission de l'Energie Atomique ou de toute autre source gouvernementale.

"Ne me demandez pas d'explication," a déclaré ici un personnage officiel. "C'est inouïe!"

BULLETIN

COLUMBUS, OHIO, Nov. 1 (UP)—The airborne town of Superior began to drift east across Ohio late today.

CHAPTER XI

THE UNCONSCIOUS Geneva Jer-vis, lying crumpled up in the oversized fur coat, was the immediate problem. Don Cort straightened her out so she lay on her back, took off her shoes and propped her ankles on the lower rung of a chair. He found she was wearing a belt and loosened it. It was obvious that she was also wearing a girdle but there wasn't anything he wanted to do about that. He was rubbing one of her wrists when her eyes fluttered open.

She smiled self-consciously. "I guess I was a sissy."

"Not at all. I saw it, too. A pair of eyes."

"And a face! A horrible, horrible face."

"I wasn't sure about the face. Can you describe it?"

She darted a tentative look at the screen but it was comforting-

ly blank. "It wasn't human. And it was staring right into me. It was awful!"

"Did it have a nose, ears, mouth?"

"I—I can't be sure. Let's get out of here. I'm all right now. Thanks for being so good to me—Don."

"Don't mention it—Jen. Here, put your shoes on."

When he had closed the big wooden door behind them Don padlocked it again, to leave things as they'd found them, even though their visit to the observation room was no longer a secret.

He was relieved when they had scrambled up the steps under the grandstand. There had been no sense of anyone or anything following them or spying on them during their long walk through the tunnel.

They were silent with their separate thoughts as they crossed the frosty ground and Jen held Don's arm, more for companionship than support. At the campus the girl excused herself, saying she still felt shaky and wanted to rest in her room. Don went back to the dining room.

The meeting was over but Alis Gareth was there, having a cup of tea and reading a book.

"Well, sir," she said, giving him an intent look, "how was the rendezvous?"

"Fair to middling." He was

relieved to see that she wasn't angry. "Did anybody say anything while I was gone?"

"Not a coherent word. You don't deserve it but I made notes for you. Running off with that redhead when you have a perfectly adequate blonde. Did you kiss her?"

"Of course not. It was strictly business. Let me see the notes, you angel."

"Notes, then." She handed over a wad of paper.

"Rubach," he read: "Magnology stuff stuff stuff etc etc. Nothing.

"Q. (Conductor Jas Brown) What abt Mayor's proclamation Superior seceded frm Earth?

"A. (Civek) repeated stuff abt discrimination agnst Spr & Cavlr & bubl gum prices.

"Q. What u xpct gain?

"A. Stuff abt end discrimination.

"Q. Sovereignty?

"A. How's that?

"Q. R u trying set up Spr as separate city-state w/govt independent of U S or Earth?" ("That Conductor Brown is sharper than I gave him credit for," Alis elaborated.)

"A. Hem & haw. Well, now.

"Q. Well, r u?

"A. (Father, rescuing Civek:) Q of sovereignty must remain temporarily up in air. Laughter (Father's). When & if Spr returns wil' acpt state-fed laws as

b4 but meantime circs warrant adapt to prevailing conditions.

"Rest of mtg was abt sleeping arangmnts, meals, recreation privileges, clothing etc."

Don folded the notes and put them in his pocket. "Thanks. I see I didn't miss much. The only thing it seems to add is that Mayor Civek is a figurehead and that if the Cavalier people know anything they're not talking, except in gobbledygook."

"Check," Alis said. "Now let's go take a look at Pittsburgh."

"Pittsburgh?"

"That's where we are now. One of the students who lives there peeped over the Edge a while ago. I was waiting for you to come back before I went to have a look."

"Pittsburgh?" Don repeated. "You mean Superior's drifting across the United States?"

"Either that or it's being pushed. Let's go see."

THERE HADN'T been much to see and it had been too cold to watch for long. The lights of Pittsburgh were beginning to go on in the dusk and the city looked pretty and far away. A Pennsylvania Air National Guard plane came up to investigate, but from a respectful distance. Then it flew off.

Don left Alis, shivering, at her door and decided he wanted a drink. He remembered having

seen a sign, *Club Lyric*, down the street from the *Sentry* office and he headed for it.

"Sergeant Cort," said a muffled voice under his collar.

Don jumped. He'd forgotten for the moment that he was a walking radio station. "Yes?" he said.

"Reception has been excellent," the voice said. It was no longer that of Captain Simmons. "You needn't recapitulate. We've heard all your conversations and feel we know as much as you do. You'll have to admit it isn't much."

"I'm afraid not. What do you want me to do now? Should I go back and investigate that underground room again? That seems to be the best lead so far."

"No. You're just a bank messenger whose biggest concern was to safeguard the contents of the brief case. Now that the contents are presumably in the bank vault your official worries are over and, though you're curious to know why Superior's acting the way it is, you're willing to let somebody else do something about it."

"But they saw me in the room. Those eyes, whatever they are. I had the feeling—well, that they weren't human."

"Nonsense!" the voice from the Pentagon said. "An ordinary closed-circuit television hookup. Don't let your imagination run

away with you and above all don't play spy. If they're suspicious of anyone it will be of Geneva Jervis because of her connection with Senator Thebold. Where are you going now?"

"Well, sir, I thought—that is, if there's no objection—I'd go have a drink. See what the townspeople are saying?"

"Good idea. Do that."

"What are they saying in Washington? Does anybody put any stock in this Magnology stuff of Professor Garet's?"

"Facts are being collated. There's been no evaluation yet. You'll hear from us again when there's something to tell you. For now, Cort, carry on. You're doing a splendid job."

The streets were cold, dark and deserted. The few street lights were feeble and the lights in houses and other buildings seemed dimmer than normal. A biting wind had sprung up and Don was glad when he saw the neon words *Club Lyric* ahead.

The bartender greeted him cheerfully. "It ain't a fit night. What'll it be?"

Don decided on a straight shot, to start. "What's going on?" he asked. "Where's the old town going?"

The bartender shrugged. "Let Civek worry about that. It's what we pay him for, ain't it?"

"I suppose so. How're you fixed for liquor? Big supply?"

"Last a coupla weeks unless people start drinking more than usual. Beer'll run out first."

"That's right, I guess. But aren't you worried about being up in the air like this?"

The bartender shrugged again. "Not much I can do about it, is there? Going to have another shot?"

"Mix it this time. A little soda. Is that the general attitude? Business as usual?"

"I hear some business is picking up. Lot of people buying winter clothes, for one thing, weather turning cold the way it did. Dabney Brothers—they run the coal and fuel oil company—got enough orders to keep them going night and day for at least a week."

"That's fine. But when they eventually run out, like you, then what? Everybody freeze to death?"

The bartender made a thoughtful face. "You got something there. Oh, hello, Ed. Kinda brisk tonight."

It was Ed Clark, the newspaperman. Clark nodded to the bartender, who began to mix him a martini. "Freeze the ears off a brass monkey," Clark said, joining Don. "I have an extra pair of earmuffs if you'd like them."

"Thanks," Don said, "but I think I'd better buy myself some winter clothes tomorrow and return yours."

"Suit yourself. Planning to settle down here?"

"I don't seem to have much choice. Anything new at your end?"

Clark lifted his brimming glass and took a sip. "Here's to a mild winter. New? I guess you know we're in Pennsylvania now and not Ohio. *Over* Pennsylvania, I should say. Don't ask me why, unless Hector Civek thinks Superior will get a better break, taxwise."

"You think the mayor's behind it all?"

"He has his delusions of grandeur, like a lot of people here. But I do think Hector knows more than he's telling. Some of the merchants—mostly those whose business hasn't benefitted by the cold wave—have called a meeting for tomorrow. They want to pump him."

"He wasn't exactly a flowing spout at Cavalier this afternoon when the people from the train wanted answers."

"So that's where he was. They couldn't find him in his office at Town Hall."

"Where's it all going to end? If we keep on drifting we'll be over the Atlantic—next stop Europe. Then Superior will be crossing national boundaries instead of just state lines, and some country may decide we're violating its air space and shoot us out of the sky."

"I see you take the long view," Clark said.

"Is there any other?" Don asked. "The alternative is to kid ourselves that everything's all right and trust in Providence and Hector Civek. What is it with you people? You don't seem to realize that sixteen square miles of solid earth, and three thousand people, have taken off to go waltzing through the sky. That isn't just something that happens. Something or somebody's making it happen. The question is who or what, and what are you going to do about it?"

The bartender said, "The boy's right, Ed. How do we know they won't take us up higher—up where there's no air? Then we'd be cooked."

Clark laughed. "'Cooked' is hardly the word. But I agree that things are getting out of hand." He set down his glass with a clink. "I know the man we want. Old Doc Bendy. He could stir things up." The bartender nodded. "Remember the time they tried to run the pipeline through town and Doc formed a citizens committee and stopped them?"

"Stopped them dead," the bartender recalled, then cleared his throat. "Speak of the devil." He raised his voice and greeted the man who had just walked in.

"Well, Doc. Long time since we've had the pleasure of your company. Nice to see you."

CHAPTER XII

DOC BENDY was an imposing old gentleman of more than average height and magnificent girth. He carried a paunch with authority. His hands, at the ends of short arms, seemed to fall naturally to it and he patted the paunch with satisfaction as he spoke. He was dressed for the cold weather in an old frock coat, black turning green, with a double line of oversized buttons down the front and huge eighteenth century lapels. He wore a battered black slouch hat which long ago had given up the pretense of holding any particular shape.

"Salutations, gentlemen!" Doc Bendy boomed, striding majestically toward the bar. "They tell me our peripatetic little town has just passed Pittsburgh. I'd have thought it more likely we'd crossed the Artic Circle. Rum, bartender, is the only suitable potable for the occasion."

Clark introduced Don, who saw that close up Doc Bendy's face was full and firm rather than fat. The nose had begun to develop the network of visible blood vessels which indicated a fondness for the bottle. Shaggy white eyebrows matched the fringe of white hair that sprouted from under the sides and back of the slouch hat. The eyes themselves were alert and humorous.

The mouth rose subtly at the corners and, though Bendy never seemed to smile outright, it conveyed the same humor as the eyes. These two features, in fact, saved the old man from seeming pompous.

Don noticed that the rum the bartender poured for Bendy was 151 proof and the portion was a generous one.

Bendy raised his glass. "Your health, gentlemen." He took a sip and put it down. "I might also drink to a happy voyage, destination unknown."

"Don here thinks we're in danger of drifting over Europe."

"A distinct possibility," Bendy said. "Your passports are in order, I trust? I remember the first time I went to the Continent. It was with Black Jack Pershing and the AEF."

"Were you in the medical corps, sir?" Don asked.

Doc Bendy boomed with laughter, holding his paunch. "Bless your soul, lad, I'm no doctor. I was on the board of directors of Superior's first hospital, hence the title. A mere courtesy, conferred on me by a grateful citizenry."

"The citizens might be looking to you again, Doc," Clark said, "since their elected representatives are letting them down."

"But not *bringing* them down, eh? Suppose you tell me what you

know, Mr. Editor. I assume you're the best-informed man on the situation, barring the conspirators who have dragged us aloft."

"You think it's a conspiracy, then?"

"It's not an act of God."

Clark began to fill an ancient pipe, so well caked that the pencil with which he tamped the tobacco barely fitted into the bowl. By the time the pipe was ready for a match he had exhausted the solid facts. He then told Doc Bendy what Don had told him. He was about to go further when the old man held up a hand.

"The facts only, if you please. We'll leave the fancy for your excellent editorial column. Mr. Cort, what you saw in the underground chamber fits in remarkably with something I stumbled on this afternoon while I was skating."

"Skating?" Clark said.

"Ice skating. At North Lake. It's completely frozen over and I'm not so decrepit that I can't glide on a pair of blades. Well, I was gliding along, humming the *Skater's Waltz*, when I tripped over a stump. When I said I stumbled on something I was speaking literally, because I fell flat. While I lay there, with the breath knocked out of me, my face was only an inch from the ice and I realized I was eye-to-

eye with a thing. Just as you were, Mr. Cort."

"You mean there was something under the ice?"

"Exactly. Staring up at me. Balefully, I suppose you could say, as if it resented my presence."

"Did you see the whole face?"

"I'd be embroidering if I said yes. It seemed— But I must stick to the facts. I saw only the eyes. Two perfectly circular eyes, which glared at me for a moment, then disappeared."

"It could have been a fish," Clark said.

"No. A fish is about the most expressionless thing there is, while these eyes had intelligence behind them. None of your empty fishy stares."

Clark knocked his pipe against the edge of the bar so the ashes fell in the vicinity of an old brass cuspidor. "So, since what you and Don saw were both under the surface, we could put two and two together and assume that some kind of alien beings have taken up residence in Superior's lower levels?"

"Only if you think two and two make five," Doc Bendy said. "But even if they don't, there's a great deal more going on than Civek knows, or the Garet-Rubach crowd at Cavalier will admit. It seems to me, gentlemen, that it's time I set up a committee."

CHAPTER XIII

MISS LEORA FRISBIE, spinster, was found dead in the mushroom cellar of her home on Ryder Avenue in the northeastern part of town. She had been sitting in a camp chair, bundled in heavy clothing, when she died. She had been subject to heart trouble and that fact, coupled with notes she had been making on a pad in her lap led the coroner to believe she had been frightened to death.

The first entry on the pad said: *Someone stealing my mushrooms; must keep vigil.* The notes continued:

Sitting in chair near stairs. Single 60-w. bulb dims, gravity increases. Superior rising again? Movement in corner—soil being pushed up from underneath. Hand. Hand? Claw!

Claw withdraws.

Head. Rat? No. Bigger.

Human? No. But the eyes eyes ey—

That was all.

Photostatic copies of the late Miss Frisbie's notes and the coroner's report became Exhibits 1 and 2 in Doc Bendy's dossier.

Exhibit 3 was a carbon copy of a report by the stock control clerk at the bubble gum factory.

Bubble gum had been piling up in the warehouse on the railroad siding back of Reilly Street. The stock control clerk,

Armand Specht, was taking inventory when he saw a movement at the far end of the warehouse. His report read:

Investigated and found carton had been dislodged from top of pile and broken into. Gross of Cheeky brand missing. Saw something sitting with back to me opening package, stuffing gum into mouth, wax paper and all, half dozen at time. Looked like overgrown chimpanzee. It turned and saw me, continuing to chew. Didn't get clear look before it disappeared but noticed two things, one that its cheeks bulged out from chewing so much gum at once and other that its eyes were round and bright, even in dim corner. Then animal turned and disappeared behind pile of Cheekys. No chimpanzee. Didn't follow right away but when I did it was gone.

Exhibit 4:

Dear Diary:

There wasn't any TV tonight and I asked Grandfather Bendy what to do and he said "Marie, when I was young, boys and girls made their own fun" and so I got out the Scrabble and asked Mom and Dad to play but they said no they had to go to the Warners and play bridge which I forgot. So they went and I was playing pretending I was both sides when the door opened and I said Hello Grandfather but it wasn't him it was like a kangaroo and it

had big eyes that were friendly.

After a while I went over and scratched its ears and it liked that and then it went over to the table and looked at the Scrabble. I thought wouldn't it be funny if it could play but it couldn't. But it could spell! It had hands like claws with long black fingernails and fur on them (the fingers) and it pushed the letters around so they spelled NAME and I spelled out MARIE.

Then I spelled out WHO ARE YOU and it spelled GIZL.

Then I spelled HOW OLD ARE YOU and it put all the blank spaces together.

I said WHERE DO YOU LIVE and it spelled HERE. Then I changed that to WHERE DO YOU COME FROM and it pointed to the blanks again.

The gizl went away before Mom and Dad came home and I didn't tell them about it but I'll tell Grandfather Bendy because he understands better about things like the time I had an invisible friend.

CHAPTER XIV

DON CORT went to bed in the dormitory at Cavalier with the surprised realization that it had been only 24 hours since Superior took off. It seemed more like a week. When he woke up the floating town was over New York.

Some high-flying skywriters were at work. WELCOME SUPERIOR DRINK PEPSI-COLA, their message said.

Don dressed quickly and hurried to the brink. Alis Garet was there among a little crowd, bundled up in a parka.

"Is that the Hudson River?" she asked him. "Where's the Empire State Building?"

"Yes," he said. "Haven't you ever been to New York? I can't quite make it out. It's somewhere south of that patch of green—that's Central Park."

"No; I've never been out of Ohio. I thought New York was a big city."

"It's big enough. Don't forget we're four miles up. Have you seen any planes besides the skywriters?"

"Just some airliners, way down," she said. "Were you expecting someone?"

"Seeing how it's our last port of call, I thought there might be some Federal boys flying around. I shouldn't think they'd want a chunk of their real estate exported to Europe."

"Are we going to Europe?"

"Bound to if we don't change course."

"Why?"

"My very next words were going to be 'Don't ask me why.' I ask you. You're closer to the horse's mouth than I am."

"If you mean Father," Alis

said, "I told you I don't enjoy his confidence."

"Haven't you even got an inkling of what he's up to?"

"I'm sure he's not the Master Mind, if that's what you mean."

"Then who is? Rubach? Civek? The chief of police? Or—the bubble gum king, whoever he is?"

"Cheeky McFerson?" She laughed. "I went to grade school with him and if he's got a mind I never noticed it."

"McFerson? He's just a kid?"

"His father died a couple of years ago and Cheeky's the president on paper, but the business office runs things. We call him Cheeky because he always had a wad of company gum in his cheek. Supposed to be an advertisement. But he never gave me any and I always chewed Wrigley's for spite."

"Oh." Don chewed the inside of his own cheek and watched the coastline. "That's Connecticut now," he said. "We're certainly not slowing down for Customs."

A speck, trailing vapor through the cold upper air, headed toward them from the general direction of New England. As it came closer Don saw that it was a B-58 Hustler bomber. He recognized it by the mysterious pod it carried under its body, three-quarters as long as the fuselage.

"It's not going to shoot us down, is it?" Alis asked.

"Hardly. I'm glad to see it. It's about time somebody took an interest in us besides Bobby Thebold and his leftover Lightnings."

The B-58 rapidly closed the last few miles between them, banked and circled Superior.

"Attention people of Superior," a voice from the plane said. The magnified words reached them distinctly through the cold air. "Inasmuch as you are now leaving the continental United States, this aircraft has been assigned to accompany you. From this point on you are under the protection of the United States Air Force."

"That's better," Don said. "It's not much, but at least somebody's doing something."

The B-58 streaked off and took up a course in a vast circle around them.

"I'm not so sure I like having it around," Alis said. "I mean suppose they find out that Superior's controlled by—I don't know—let's say a foreign power, or an alien race. Once we're out over the Atlantic where nobody else could get hurt wouldn't they maybe consider it a small sacrifice to wipe out Superior to get rid of the—the alien?"

Don looked at her closely. "What's this about an alien? What do you know?"

"I don't *know* anything. It's just a feeling I have, that this is bigger than Father and Mayor Civek and all the self-important VIPs in Superior put together." She squeezed his arm as if to draw comfort from him. "Maybe it's seeing the ocean and realizing the vastness of it, but for the first time I'm beginning to feel a little scared."

"I won't say there's nothing to be afraid of," Don said. He pulled her hand through his arm. "It isn't as though this were a precedented situation. But whatever's going on, remember there are some pretty good people on our side, too."

"I know," she said. "And you're one of them."

He wondered what she meant by that. Nothing, probably, except "Thank you for the reassurance." He decided that was it; the mechanical eavesdropper he wore under his collar was making him too self-conscious. He tried to think of something appropriate to say to her that he wouldn't mind having overheard in the Pentagon.

Nothing occurred to him, so he drew Alis closer and gave her a quick, quiet kiss.

THE CROWD of people looking out over the Edge had grown. Judging by their number, few people were in school or at their jobs today. Yesterday they had

seemed only mildly interested in what their town was up to but today, with the North American continent about to be left behind, they were paying more attention. Yet Don could see no signs of alarm on their faces. At most there was a reflection of wonder, but not much more than there might be among a group of Europeans seeing New York harbor from shipboard for the first time. An apathetic bunch, he decided, who would be resigned to their situation so long as the usual pattern of their lives was not interfered with unduly. What they lacked, of course, was leadership.

"It's big, isn't it?" Alis said. She was looking at the Atlantic, which was virtually the only thing left to see except the bright blue sky, a strip of the New England coast and the circling bomber.

"It's going to get bigger," Don said. "Shall we go across town and take a last look at the States?" He also wanted to see what, if anything, was going on in town.

"Not the last, I hope. I'd prefer a round trip."

An enterprising cab driver opened his door for them. "Special excursion rate to the West End," he said; "one buck."

"You're on," Don said. "How's business?"

"Not what you'd call boom-

ing. No trains to meet. No buses. Hi, Alis. This isn't one of your father's brainstorm come to life, is it?"

"Hi, Chuck," she said. "I seriously doubt it, though I'm sure you'd never get him to admit it. How are your wife and the boy?"

"Fine. That boy, he's got some imagination. He's digging a hole in the backyard. Last week he told us he was getting close to China. Today's it's Australia. He said at supper last night that they must have heard about his hole and started digging from the other end. They've connected up, according to him, and he had quite a conversation with a kangaroo."

"A kangaroo?" Don sat up straight.

"Yeah. You know how kids are. I guess he's studying Australia in geography."

"What did the kangaroo tell your son?"

The cab driver laughed defensively. "There's nothing wrong with the boy. He's just got an active mind."

"Of course. When I was a kid I used to talk to bears. But what did he say the kangaroo talked about?"

"Oh, just crazy stuff—I mean imaginative stuff—like the kangaroos didn't like it Down Under any more and were coming up here because it was safer."

CHAPTER XV

LATER THAT MORNING, at about the time Don Cort estimated that Superior had passed the twelve-mile limit—east from the coast, not up—the Superior State Bank was held up.

A man clearly recognized as Joe Negus, a small-time gambler, and one other man had driven up to the bank in Negus's flashy Buick convertible. They walked up to the head teller, threatened him with pistols and demanded all the money in all the tills. They stuffed the bills in a sack, got into their car and drove off. They took nothing from the customers and made no attempt to take anything from the vault.

The fact that they ignored the vault made Don feel better. He thought when he first heard about the robbery that the men might have been after the handcuff brief case he'd stored there, which would have meant he was under suspicion. But apparently the job was a genuine heist, not a cover-up for something else.

Police Chief Vincent Grande reached the scene half an hour after the criminals left it. His car had frozen up and wouldn't start. He arrived by taxi, red-faced, fingering the butt of his holstered service automatic.

Negus and his confederate, identified as a poolroom lounge

named Hank Stacy, had got away with a hundred thousand dollars.

"I didn't know there was that much money in town," was Grande's comment on that. While he was asking other questions the telephone rang and someone told the bank president he'd seen Negus and Stacy go into the poolroom. In fact, the robbers' convertible was parked blatantly in front of the place.

Grande, looking as if he'd rather be a dog catcher, got back into the taxi.

Joe Negus and Hank Stacy were sitting on opposite sides of a pool table when the police chief got there, dividing the money in three piles. A third man stood by, watching closely. He was Jerry Lynch, a lawyer. He greeted Grande.

"Morning, Vince," he said easily. "Come to shoot a little pool?"

"I'll shoot some bank robbers if they don't hand over that money," Grande said. He had his gun out and looked almost purposeful.

Negus and Stacy made no attempt to go for their guns. Stacy seemed nervous but Negus went on counting the money without looking up.

"Is it your money, Vince?" Jerry Lynch asked.

"You know damn well whose money it is. Now let's have it."

"I'm afraid I couldn't do that," the lawyer said. "In the first place I wouldn't want to, thirty-three and a third per cent of it being mine, and in the second place you have no authority."

"I'm the chief of police," Grande said doggedly. "I don't want to spill any blood—"

"Don't flash your badge at me, Vince," Lynch said. Negus had finished counting the money and the lawyer took one of the piles and put it in various pockets. "I said you had no authority. Bank robbery is a federal offense. Not that I admit there's been a robbery. But if you suspect a crime it's your duty to go to the proper authorities. The FBI would be indicated, if you know where they can be reached."

"Yeah," Joe Negus said. "Go take a flying jump for yourself, Chief."

"Listen, you cheap crook—"

"Hardly cheap, Vince," Lynch said. "And not even a crook, in my professional opinion. Mr. Negus pleads extraterritoriality."

THAT WAS the start of Superior's crime wave.

Somebody broke the plate glass window of George Tocher's dry goods store and got away with blankets, half a dozen overcoats and several sets of woolen underwear.

A fuel oil truck disappeared from the street outside of Dab-

ney Brothers' and was found abandoned in the morning. About nine hundred gallons had been drained out—as if someone had filled his cellar tank and a couple of his neighbors'.

The back door of the supermarket was forced and somebody made off with a variety of groceries. The missing goods would have just about filled one car.

Each of these crimes was understandable — Superior's growing food and fuel shortage and icy temperatures had led a few people to desperation.

But there were other incidents. Somebody smashed the window at Kimbrough's Jewelry Store and snatched a display of medium-priced watches.

Half a dozen young vandals sneaked into the Catholic Church and began toppling statues of the saints. When they were surprised by Father Brian they fled, bombarding him with prayer books. One of the books shattered a stained glass window depicting Christ dispensing loaves and fishes.

Somebody started a fire in the movie house balcony and nearly caused a panic.

Vincent Grande rushed from place to place, investigating, but rarely learned enough to make an arrest. The situation was becoming unpleasant. Superior had always been a friendly place to live, where everyone knew every-

one else, at least to say hello to, but now there was suspicion and fear, not to mention increasing cold and threatened famine.

EVERYONE was cheered up, therefore, when Mayor Hector Civek announced a mass meeting in Town Square. Bonfires were lit and the reviewing stand that was used for the annual Founders' Day parade was hauled out as a speakers' platform.

Civek was late. The crowd, bundled up against the cold, was stamping its feet and beginning to shout a bit when he arrived. There was a medium-sized cheer as the mayor climbed the platform.

"Fellow citizens," he began, then stopped to search through his overcoat pockets.

"Well," he went on, "I guess I put the speech in an inside pocket and it's too cold to look for it. I know what it says, anyway."

This brought a few laughs. Don Cort stood near the edge of the crowd and watched the people around him. They mostly had a no-nonsense look about them—as if they were not going to be satisfied with mere oratory.

Civek said: "I'm not going to keep you standing in the cold and tell you what you already know—how our food supplies are dwindling, how we're using up our stocks of coal and fuel oil

with no immediate hope of replacement—you know all that."

"We sure do, Hector," somebody called out.

"Yes; so, as I say, I'm not going to talk about what the problem is. We don't need words—we need action."

He paused as if he expected a cheer, or applause, but the crowd merely stood and waited for him to go on.

"If Superior had been hit by a flood or a tornado," Civek said, "we could look to the Red Cross and the state or federal government for help. But we've been the victims of a far greater misfortune—torn from the bosom of Mother Earth and flung—"

"Oh, come on, Hector," an old woman said. "We're getting froze."

"I'm sorry about that, Mrs. Potts," Civek said. "You should be home where it's warm."

"We ran out of coal for the furnace and now we're running out of logs. Are you going to do something about that?"

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Mrs. Potts, for you and all the other wonderful people here tonight.

"We're going to put a stop to this lawlessness we never had before. We're going to make Superior a place to be proud of. Superior has changed—risen, you might say—to a new status. We're more than a town, now.

We're free and separate not only from Ohio but from the United States.

"We're a sovereign place, a—a sovereignty—and we need new methods to cope with new conditions—to restore law and order—to see that all our subjects — our citizen-subjects — are provided for."

The crowd had become hushed as Civek neared his point.

"To that end," Civek went on, "—to that noble end I dedicate myself and I take this momentous step and hereby proclaim the existence of the Kingdom of Superior—" he paused to take a deep breath "—and proclaim myself its first King."

He stopped. His oratory had carried him to a climax and he didn't quite know where to go from there. Maybe he expected cheers to carry him over, but none came. There was complete silence except for the crackling of the bonfires.

But after a moment there was a shuffling of feet and a whispering that grew to a murmur. Then out of the murmur came derisive shouts and catcalls.

"King Hector the First!" somebody hooted. "Long live the King!"

The words could have been

gratifying but the tone of voice was all wrong.

"Where's Hector's crown?" somebody else cried. "Hey, Jack, did you forget to bring the crown?"

"Yeah," Jack said. "I forgot. But I got a rope over on my truck. We could elevate him that way."

Jack was obviously joking but a group of men in another part of the crowd pushed toward the platform. "Yeah," one of them said, "let's string him up."

A woman at the back of the crowd screamed. Two hairy figures about five feet tall appeared from the darkness. They were kangaroo-like, with long tails. No one tried to stop them and the creatures reached the platform and pulled Hector down. They placed him between them and, their way clear now, began to hop away.

Their hops grew longer as they reached the edge of the square. Their leaps had become prodigious as they disappeared in the direction of North Lake, Civek in his heavy coat looking almost like one of them.

Don Cort couldn't tell whether the creatures were kidnapping Civek or rescuing him.

(To be concluded)

∞ ∞ ∞

The next *Infinity* goes on sale DEC. 26!



TOMORROWNESS

SCIENCE FICTION is not dead! Sounds silly, doesn't it? I certainly *feel* silly about issuing such a proclamation—something like the way Jayne Mansfield might feel, perhaps, if she had to stand up and announce that sex is not dead.

After all, INFINITY is a science fiction magazine. It comes out regularly, and every issue contains science fiction. I happen to think it contains good science fiction. And, at the risk of plugging the competition, I might point out that science fiction is still being published in books and in other magazines, too—and some of *that* isn't bad, either.

Lately, though, a number of people have been going around saying that science fiction is dead, or at least dying. And while some of these people are good friends of mine, I think they're wrong. That's right—dead wrong.

It's true, of course, that science fiction isn't as young as it used to be. A lot of it has gone over the stands since the first special-

ized sf magazine was published more than 30 years ago. Science fiction has developed and changed during that time—and nobody could be expected to like all of the things that have happened to it.

But it isn't dead.

It's harder for a writer to find a really new idea today than it was 30 years ago. A lot of the basic (or primitive) ideas used then just wouldn't be acceptable today. A lot of others have been used over and over again, until it's hard to find ways to use them that won't be over-familiar. More and more often, the new stories being published today are variations on old themes, instead of statements and developments of brand-new ones.

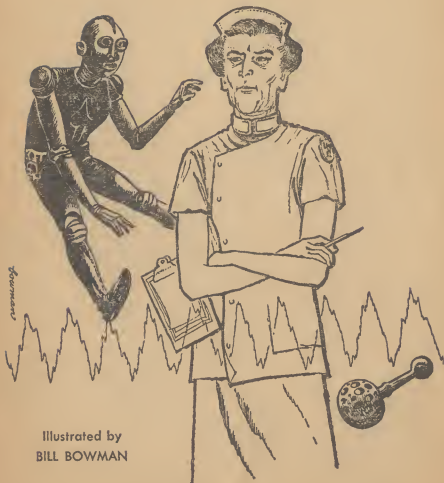
But none of this proves that science fiction is dead. And nobody is going to prove that science fiction is dead, as long as there is so much of it being born every day.

Is anything dead, then? Or are the people who keep pointing to the corpse of sf utterly befud-

(Continued on page 124)

LENNY

by ISAAC ASIMOV



Illustrated by
BILL BOWMAN

UNITED STATES Robots and Mechanical Men, Inc., had a problem. The problem was people.

Peter Bogert, Senior Mathematician, was on his way to Assembly when he encountered Alfred Lanning, Research Director. Lanning was bending his ferocious white eyebrows together and star-

ing down across the railing into the computer room.

On the floor below the balcony, a trickle of humanity of both sexes and various ages was looking about curiously, while a guide intoned a set speech about robotic computing.

"This computer you see before you," he said, "is the largest of

What's the use of a robot that can perform

no job at all, and may be dangerous to boot?



its type in the world. It contains five million three hundred thousand and cryostats and is capable of dealing simultaneously with over one hundred thousand variables. With its help, U. S. Robots is able to design with precision the positronic brains of new models.

"The requirements are fed in on tape which is perforated by the action of this keyboard—something like a very complicated typewriter or linotype machine, except that it does not deal with letters but with concepts. Statements are broken down into the symbolic logic equivalents and those in turn converted to perforation patterns.

"The computer can, in less than one hour, present our scientists with a design for a brain which will give all the necessary positronic paths to make a robot . . ."

Alfred Lanning looked up at last and noticed the other. "Ah, Peter," he said.

Bogert raised both hands to smooth down his already perfectly smooth and glossy head of black hair. He said, "You don't look as though you think much of this, Alfred."

Lanning grunted. The idea of public guided tours of U. S. Robots was of fairly recent origin, and was supposed to serve a dual function. On the one hand, the theory went, it allowed people to see robots at close quarters and

counter their almost instinctive fear of the mechanical objects through increased familiarity. And on the other hand, it was supposed to interest at least an occasional person in taking up robotics research as a life work.

"You know I don't," Lanning said finally. "Once a week, work is disrupted. Considering the man-hours lost, the return is insufficient."

"Still no rise in job applications, then?"

"Oh, some, but only in the categories where the need isn't vital. It's research men that are needed. You know that. The trouble is that with robots forbidden on Earth itself, there's something unpopular about being a roboticist."

"The damned Frankenstein complex," said Bogert, consciously imitating one of the other's pet phrases.

Lanning missed the gentle jab. He said, "I ought to be used to it, but I never will. You'd think that by now every human being on Earth would know that the Three Laws represented a perfect safeguard; that robots are simply not dangerous. Take this bunch." He glowered down. "Look at them. Most of them go through the robot assembly room for the thrill of fear, like riding a roller coaster. Then when they enter the room with the MEC model—damn it, Peter, a MEC

model that will do nothing on God's green Earth but take two steps forward, say 'Pleased to meet you, sir,' shake hands, then take two steps back—they back away and mothers snatch up their kids. How do we expect to get brainwork out of such idiots?"

Bogert had no answer. Together, they stared down once again at the line of sightseers, now passing out of the computer room and into the positronic brain assembly section. Then they left. They did not, as it turned out, observe Mortimer W. Jacobson, age 16—who, to do him complete justice, meant no harm whatever.

IN FACT, it could not even be said to be Mortimer's fault. The day of the week on which the tour took place was known to all workers. All devices in its path ought to have been carefully neutralized or locked, since it was unreasonable to expect human beings to withstand the temptation to handle knobs, keys, handles and pushbuttons. In addition, the guide ought to have been very carefully on the watch for those who succumbed.

But, at the time, the guide had passed into the next room and Mortimer was tailing the line. He passed the keyboard on which instructions were fed into the computer. He had no way of suspecting that the plans for a

new robot design were being fed into it at that moment, or, being a good kid, he would have avoided the keyboard. He had no way of knowing that, by what amounted to almost criminal negligence, a technician had not inactivated the keyboard.

So Mortimer touched the keys at random as though he were playing a musical instrument.

He did not notice that a section of perforated tape stretched itself out of the instrument in another part of the room—soundlessly, unobtrusively.

Nor did the technician, when he returned, discover any signs of tampering. He felt a little uneasy at noticing that the keyboard was live, but did not think to check. After a few minutes, even his first trifling uneasiness was gone, and he continued feeding data into the computer.

As for Mortimer, neither then, nor ever afterward, did he know what he had done.

THE NEW LNE model was designed for the mining of boron in the asteroid belt. The boron hydrides were increasing in value yearly as primers for the proton micro-piles that carried the ultimate load of power production on spaceships, and Earth's own meager supply was running thin.

Physically, that meant that the LNE robots would have to be equipped with eyes sensitive to

those lines necessary in the spectroscopic analysis of boron ores and the type of limbs most useful for the working up of ore to finished product. As always, though, the mental equipment was the major problem.

The first LNE positronic brain had been completed now. It was the prototype and would join all other prototypes in U. S. Robots' collection. When finally tested, others would then be manufactured for leasing (never selling) to mining corporations.

LNE-Prototype was complete now. Tall, straight, polished, it looked from outside like any of a number of not-too-specialized robot models.

The technician in charge, guided by the directions for testing in the *Handbook of Robotics*, said, "How are you?"

The indicated answer was to have been, "I am well and ready to begin my functions. I trust you are well, too," or some trivial modification thereof.

This first exchange served no purpose but to show that the robot could hear, understand a routine question, and make a routine reply congruent with what one would expect of a robotic attitude. Beginning from there, one could pass on to more complicated matters that would test the different Laws and their interaction with the specialized knowledge of each particular model.

So the technician said, "How are you?" He was instantly jolted by the nature of LNE-Prototype's voice. It had a quality like no robotic voice he had ever heard (and he had heard many). It formed syllables like the chimes of a low-pitched celeste.

So surprising was this that it was only after several moments that the technician heard, in retrospect, the syllables that had been formed by those heavenly tones.

They were, "Da, da, da, goo."

The robot still stood tall and straight but its right hand crept upward and a finger went into its mouth.

The technician stared in absolute horror and bolted. He locked the door behind him and, from another room, put in an emergency call to Dr. Susan Calvin.

DR. SUSAN CALVIN was U. S. Robots' (and, virtually, mankind's) only robopsychologist. She did not have to go very far in her testing of LNE-Prototype before she called very peremptorily for a transcript of the computer-drawn plans of the positronic brain-paths and the taped instructions that had directed them. After some study, she, in turn, sent for Bogert.

Her iron-gray hair was drawn severely back; her cold face, with its strong vertical lines marked

off by the horizontal gash of the pale, thin-lipped mouth, turned intensely upon him.

"What *is* this, Peter?"

Bogert studied the passages she pointed out with increasing stupefaction and said, "Good Lord, Susan, it makes no sense."

"It most certainly doesn't. How did it get into the instructions?"

The technician in charge, called upon, swore in all sincerity that it was none of his doing, and that he could not account for it. The computer checked out negative for all attempts at flaw-finding.

"The positronic brain," said Susan Calvin, thoughtfully, "is past redemption. So many of the higher functions have been cancelled out by these meaningless directions that the result is very like a human baby."

Bogert looked surprised, and Susan Calvin took on a frozen attitude at once, as she always did at the least expressed or implied doubt of her word. She said, "We make every effort to make a robot as mentally like a man as possible. Eliminate what we call the adult functions and what is naturally left is a human infant, mentally speaking. Why do you look so surprised, Peter?"

LNE-Prototype, who showed no signs of understanding any of the things that were going on around it, suddenly slipped into

a sitting position and began a minute examination of its feet.

Bogert stared at it. "It's a shame to have to dismantle the creature. It's a handsome job."

"Dismantle it?" said the ro-bopsychologist forcefully.

"Of course, Susan. What's the use of this thing? Good Lord, if there's one object completely and abysmally useless it's a robot without a job it can perform. You don't pretend there's a job this thing can do, do you?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, then?"

Susan Calvin said, stubbornly, "I want to conduct more tests."

Bogert looked at her with a moment's impatience, then shrugged. If there was one person at U. S. Robots with whom it was useless to dispute, surely that was Susan Calvin. Robots were all she loved, and long association with them, it seemed to Bogert, had deprived her of any appearance of humanity. She was no more to be argued out of a decision than was a triggered micro-pile to be argued out of operating.

"What's the use?" he breathed; then aloud, hastily: "Will you let us know when your tests are complete?"

"I will," she said. "Come, Lenny."

(LNE, thought Bogert. That becomes Lenny. Inevitable.)

Susan Calvin held out her

hand but the robot only stared at it. Gently, the robopsychologist reached for the robot's hand and took it. Lenny rose smoothly to its feet (its mechanical coordination, at least, worked well). Together they walked out, robot topping woman by two feet. Many eyes followed them curiously down the long corridors.

ONE WALL of Susan Calvin's laboratory, the one opening directly off her private office, was covered with a highly magnified reproduction of a positronic-path chart. Susan Calvin had studied it with absorption for the better part of a month.

She was considering it now, carefully, tracing the blunted paths through their contortions. Behind her, Lenny sat on the floor, moving its legs apart and together, crooning meaningless syllables to itself in a voice so beautiful that one could listen to the nonsense and be ravished.

Susan Calvin turned to the robot, "Lenny—Lenny—"

She repeated this patiently until finally Lenny looked up and made an inquiring sound. The robopsychologist allowed a glimmer of pleasure to cross her face fleetingly. The robot's attention was being gained in progressively shorter intervals.

She said, "Raise your hand, Lenny. Hand—up. Hand—up."

She raised her own hand as

she said it, over and over.

Lenny followed the movement with its eyes. Up, down, up, down. Then it made an abortive gesture with its own hand and chimed, "Eh—uh."

"Very good, Lenny," said Susan Calvin, gravely. "Try it again. Hand—up."

Very gently, she reached out her own hand, took the robot's, and raised it, lowered it. "Hand—up. Hand—up."

A voice from her office called and interrupted. "Susan?"

Calvin halted with a tightening of her lips. "What is it, Alfred?"

The research director walked in, and looked at the chart on the wall and at the robot. "Still at it?"

"I'm at my work, yes."

"Well, you know, Susan . . ."

He took out a cigar, staring at it hard, and made as though to bite off the end. In doing so, his eyes met the woman's stern look of disapproval; and he put the cigar away and began over. "Well, you know, Susan, the LNE model is in production now."

"So I've heard. Is there something in connection with it you wish of me?"

"No-o. Still, the mere fact that it is in production and is doing well means that working with this messed-up specimen is useless. Shouldn't it be scrapped?"

"In short, Alfred, you are

annoyed that I am wasting my so-valuable time. Feel relieved. My time is not being wasted. I am *working* with this robot."

"But the work has no meaning."

"I'll be the judge of that, Alfred." Her voice was ominously quiet, and Lanning thought it wiser to shift his ground.

"Will you tell me what meaning it has? What are you doing with it right now, for instance?"

"I'm trying to get it to raise its hand on the word of command. I'm trying to get it to imitate the sound of the word."

As though on cue, Lenny said, "Eh—uh" and raised its hand waveringly.

Lanning shook his head. "That voice is amazing. How does it happen?"

Susan Calvin said, "I don't quite know. Its transmitter is a normal one. It could speak normally, I'm sure. It doesn't, however; it speaks like this as a consequence of something in the positronic paths that I have not yet pinpointed."

"Well, pinpoint it, for Heaven's sake. Speech like that might be useful."

"Oh, then there is some possible use in my studies on Lenny?"

Lanning shrugged in embarrassment. "Oh, well, it's a minor point."

"I'm sorry you don't see the major points, then," said Susan

Calvin with asperity, "which are much more important, but that's not my fault. Would you leave now, Alfred, and let me go on with my work?"

LANNING got to his cigar, eventually, in Bogert's office. He said, sourly, "That woman is growing more peculiar daily."

Bogert understood perfectly. In the U. S. Robot and Mechanical Man Corporation, there was only one "that woman." He said, "Is she still scuffling about with that pseudo-robot—that Lenny of hers?"

"Trying to get it to talk, so help me."

Bogert shrugged. "Points up the company problem. I mean, about getting qualified personnel for research. If we had other robopsychologists, we could retire Susan. Incidentally, I presume the directors' meeting scheduled for tomorrow is for the purpose of dealing with the procurement problem?"

Lanning nodded and looked at his cigar as though it didn't taste good. "Yes. Quality, though, not quantity. We've raised wages until there's a steady stream of applicants—those who are interested primarily in money. The trick is to get those who are interested primarily in robotics—a few more like Susan Calvin."

"Hell, no. Not like her."

"Well, not like her personal-

ly. But you'll have to admit, Peter, that she's single-minded about robots. She has no other interest in life."

"I know. And that's exactly what makes her so unbearable."

Lanning nodded. He had lost count of the many times it would have done his soul good to have fired Susan Calvin. He had also lost count of the number of millions of dollars she had at one time or another saved the company. She was a truly indispensable woman and would remain one until she died—or until they could lick the problem of finding men and women of her own high caliber who were interested in robotics research.

He said, "I think we'll cut down on the tour business."

Peter shrugged. "If you say so. But meanwhile, seriously, what do we do about Susan? She can easily tie herself up with Lenny indefinitely. You know how she is when she gets what she considers an interesting problem."

"What *can* we do?" said Lanning. "If we become too anxious to pull her off, she'll stay on out of feminine contrariness. In the last analysis, we can't force her to do anything."

The dark-haired mathematician smiled. "I wouldn't ever apply the adjective 'feminine' to any part of her."

"Oh, well," said Lanning, grumpily. "At least, it won't do

anyone any actual harm."

In that, if in nothing else, he was wrong.

THE EMERGENCY SIGNAL is always a tension-making thing in any large industrial establishment. Such signals had sounded in the history of U. S. Robots a dozen times—for fire, flood, riot and insurrection.

But one thing had never occurred in all that time. Never had the particular signal indicating "Robot out of control" sounded. No one ever expected it to sound. It was only installed at government insistence. ("Damn the Frankenstein complex," Lanning would mutter on those rare occasions when he thought of it.)

Now, finally, the shrill siren rose and fell at ten-second intervals, and practically no worker from the President of the Board of Directors down to the newest janitor's assistant recognized the significance of the strange sound for a few moments. After those moments passed, there was a massive convergence of armed guards and medical men to the indicated area of danger and U. S. Robots was struck with paralysis.

Charles Randow, computing technician, was taken off to hospital level with a broken arm. There was no other damage. No other physical damage.

"But the moral damage,"

roared Lanning, "is beyond estimation."

Susan Calvin faced him, murderously calm. "You will do nothing to Lenny. Nothing. Do you understand?"

"Do *you* understand, Susan? That thing has hurt a human being. It has broken First Law. Don't you know what First Law is?"

"You will do nothing to Lenny."

"For God's sake, Susan, do I have to tell *you* First Law? *A robot may not harm a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.* Our entire position depends on the fact that First Law is rigidly observed by all robots of all types. If the public should hear, and they will hear, that there was an exception, even one exception, we might be forced to close down altogether. Our only chance of survival would be to announce at once that the robot involved had been destroyed, explain the circumstances, and hope that the public can be convinced that it will never happen again."

"I would like to find out exactly what happened," said Susan Calvin. "I was not present at the time and I would like to know exactly what the Randow boy was doing in my laboratories without my permission."

"The important thing that happened," said Lanning, "is ob-

vious. Your robot struck Randow and the damn fool flashed the 'Robot out of control' button and made a case of it. But your robot struck him and inflicted damage to the extent of a broken arm. The truth is your Lenny is so distorted it lacks First Law and it must be destroyed."

"It does *not* lack First Law. I have studied its brainpaths and know it does not lack it."

"Then how could it strike a man?" Desperation turned him to sarcasm. "Ask Lenny. Surely you have taught it to speak by now."

Susan Calvin's cheeks flushed a painful pink. She said, "I prefer to interview the victim. And in my absence, Alfred, I want my offices sealed tight, with Lenny inside. I want no one to approach him. If any harm comes to him while I am gone, this company will not see me again under any circumstances."

"Will you agree to its destruction, if it has broken First Law?"

"Yes," said Susan Calvin, "because I know it hasn't."

CHARLES RANDOW lay in bed with his arm set and in a cast. His major suffering was still from the shock of those few moments in which he thought a robot was advancing on him with murder in its positronic mind. No other human had ever had

such reason to fear direct robotic harm as he had had just then. He had had a unique experience.

Susan Calvin and Alfred Lanning stood beside his bed now; Peter Bogert, who had met them on the way, was with them. Doctors and nurses had been shooed out.

Susan Calvin said, "Now—what happened?"

Randow was daunted. He muttered, "The thing hit me in the arm. It was coming at me."

Calvin said, "Move further back in the story. What were you doing in my laboratory without authorization?"

The young computer swallowed, and the Adam's apple in his thin neck bobbed noticeably. He was high-cheekboned and abnormally pale. He said, "We all knew about your robot. The word is you were trying to teach it to talk like a musical instrument. There were bets going as to whether it talked or not. Some said—uh—you could teach a gatepost to talk."

"I suppose," said Susan Calvin, freezingly, "that is meant as a compliment. What did that have to do with you?"

"I was supposed to go in there and settle matters—see if it would talk, you know. We swiped a key to your place and I waited till you were gone and went in. We had a lottery on who was to do it. I lost."

"Then?"

"I tried to get it to talk and it hit me."

"What do you mean, you tried to get it to talk? How did you try?"

"I—I asked it questions, but it wouldn't say anything, and I had to give the thing a fair shake, so I kind of—yelled at it, and—"

"And?"

There was a long pause. Under Susan Calvin's unwavering stare, Randow finally said, "I tried to scare it into saying something." He added defensively. "I had to give the thing a fair shake."

"How did you try to scare it?"

"I pretended to take a punch at it."

"And it brushed your arm aside?"

"It *bit* my arm."

"Very well. That's all." To Lanning and Bogert, she said, "Come, gentlemen."

At the doorway, she turned back to Randow. "I can settle the bets going around, if you are still interested. Lenny can speak a few words quite well."

THEY SAID NOTHING until they were in Susan Calvin's office. Its walls were lined with her books, some of which she had written herself. It retained the patina of her own frigid, carefully-ordered personality. It had only one chair in it and she

sat down. Lanning and Bogert remained standing.

She said, "Lenny only defended itself. That is the Third Law: *A robot must protect its own existence.*"

"Except," said Lanning forcefully, "*when this conflicts with the First or Second Laws.* Complete the statement! Lenny had no right to defend itself in any way at the cost of harm, however minor, to a human being."

"Nor did it," shot back Calvin, "*knowingly.* Lenny has an aborted brain. It had no way of knowing its own strength or the weakness of humans. In brushing aside the threatening arm of a human being it could not know the bone would break. In human terms, no moral blame can be attached to an individual who honestly cannot differentiate good and evil."

Bogert interrupted, soothingly, "Now, Susan, *we* don't blame. *We* understand that Lenny is the equivalent of a baby, humanly speaking, and we don't blame it. But the public will. U. S. Robots will be closed down."

"Quite the opposite. If you had the brains of a flea, Peter, you would see that this is the opportunity U. S. Robots is waiting for. That this will solve its problems."

Lanning hunched his white eyebrows low. He said, softly, "What problems, Susan?"

"Isn't the corporation concerned about maintaining our research personnel at the present—Heaven help us—high level?"

"We certainly are."

"Well, what are you offering prospective researchers? Excitement? Novelty? The thrill of piercing the unknown? No! You offer them salaries and the assurance of no problems."

Bogert said, "How do you mean, no problems?"

"Are there problems?" shot back Susan Calvin. "What kind of robots do we turn out? Fully developed robots, fit for their tasks. An industry tells us what it needs; a computer designs the brain; machinery forms the robot; and there it is, complete and done. Peter, some time ago, you asked me with reference to Lenny what its use was. What's the use, you said, of a robot that was not designed for any job? Now I ask you—what's the use of a robot designed for only one job? It begins and ends in the same place. The LNE models mine boron. If beryllium is needed, they are useless. If boron technology enters a new phase, they become useless. A human being so designed would be sub-human. A robot so designed is sub-robotic."

"Do you want a versatile robot?" asked Lanning, incredulously.

"Why not?" demanded the

robopsychologist. "Why not? I've been handed a robot with a brain almost completely stultified. I've been teaching it, and you, Alfred, asked me what was the use of that. Perhaps very little as far as Lenny itself is concerned, since it will never progress beyond the five-year-old level on a human scale. But what's the use in general? A very great deal, if you consider it as a study in the abstract problem of *learning how to teach robots*. I have learned ways to short-circuit neighboring pathways in order to create new ones. More study will yield better, more subtle and more efficient techniques of doing so."

"Well?"

"Suppose you started with a positronic brain that had all the basic pathways carefully outlined but none of the secondaries. Suppose you then started creating secondaries. You could sell basic robots designed for instruction; robots that could be modelled to a job, and then modelled to another, if necessary. Robots would become as versatile as human beings. *Robots could learn!*"

They stared at her.

She said, impatiently, "You still don't understand, do you?"

"I understand what you are saying," said Lanning.

"Don't you understand that with a completely new field of research and completely new

techniques to be developed, with a completely new area of the unknown to be penetrated, youngsters will feel a new urge to enter robotics? Try it and see."

"May I point out," said Bogert, smoothly, "that this is dangerous. Beginning with ignorant robots such as Lenny will mean that one could never trust First Law—exactly as turned out in Lenny's case."

"Exactly. Advertise the fact."

"*Advertise it!*"

"Of course. Broadcast the danger. Explain that you will set up a new research institute on the moon, if Earth's population chooses not to allow this sort of thing to go on upon Earth, but stress the danger to the possible applicants by all means."

Lanning said, "For God's sake, why?"

"Because the spice of danger will add to the lure. Do you think nuclear technology involves no danger and spationautics no peril? Has your lure of absolute security been doing the trick for you? Has it helped you to cater to the Frankenstein complex you all despise so? Try something else then, something that has worked in other fields."

There was a sound from beyond the door that led to Calvin's personal laboratories. It was the chiming sound of Lenny.

The robopsychologist broke off instantly, listening. She said,

"Excuse me. I think Lenny is calling me."

"Can it call you?" said Lanning.

"I said I've managed to teach it a few words." She stepped toward the door, a little flustered. "If you will wait for me—"

THEY WATCHED her leave and were silent for a moment. Then Lanning said, "Do you think there's anything to what she says, Peter?"

"Just possibly, Alfred," said Bogert. "Just possibly. Enough for us to bring the matter up at the directors' meeting and see what they say. After all, the fat *is* in the fire. A robot has harmed a human being and knowledge of it is public. As Susan says, we might as well try to turn the matter to our advantage.

"Of course, I distrust her motives in all this."

"How do you mean?"

"Even if all she has said is perfectly true, it is only rationalization as far as she is concerned. Her motive in all this is her desire to hold on to this robot. If we pressed her," (and the mathematician smiled at the incongruous literal meaning of the phrase) "she would say it was to continue learning techniques of teaching robots, but I think she has found another use for Lenny. A rather unique one that would fit only Susan of all women."

"I don't get your drift."

Bogert said, "Did you hear what the robot was calling?"

"Well, no, I didn't quite—" began Lanning, when the door opened suddenly, and both men stopped talking at once.

Susan Calvin stepped in again, looking about uncertainly. "Have either of you seen— I'm positive I had it somewhere about— Oh, there it is."

She ran to a corner of one bookcase and picked up an object of intricate metal webbery, dumb-bell shaped and hollow, with variously-shaped metal pieces inside each hollow, just too large to be able to fall out of the webbing.

As she picked it up, the metal pieces within moved and struck together, clicking pleasantly. It struck Lanning that the object was a kind of robotic version of a baby rattle.

As Susan Calvin opened the door again to pass through, Lenny's voice chimed again from within. This time, Lanning heard it clearly as it spoke the words Susan Calvin had taught it.

In heavenly celeste-like sounds, it called out, "Mommie, I want you. I want you, Mommie."

And the footsteps of Susan Calvin could be heard hurrying eagerly across the laboratory floor toward the only kind of baby she could ever have or love.

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Beyond Our Control

The "technical difficulties" on Satellite

Four became a menace to the entire Earth!

by RANDALL GARRETT

Illustrated by RICHARD KLUGA

CHAPTER I

THE BIG BUILDING stood out at night, even among the other towering spires of Manhattan. The bright, glowing symbol on its roof attracted the attention of anyone who looked up at the night sky of New York; and from the coast of Connecticut, across Long Island Sound,

the huge ball was easily visible as a shining dot of light.

The symbol—as a symbol—resembled the well-known symbol of an atom. It consisted of a central globe surrounded by a swarm of swiftly-moving points of light that circled the glowing sphere endlessly. It represented the Earth itself and the robot-operated artificial satellites that

whirled around it. It was the trademark of Circum-Global Communications.

But it was more than just a symbol; it was also the antenna for the powerful transmitters that kept constant contact with the satellite relay stations which, in turn, rebroadcast the TV impulses to all parts of the globe.

Inside the CGC Building, completely filling the upper twenty floors, were the sections of the vast electronic brain that computed and integrated the orbits of the small artificial moons and kept the communication beams linked to them. And below the brain, occupying another four floors, were the control and monitoring rooms, in which the TV communications of a world were selected and programmed.

In Johannesburg, South Africa, the newly-elected President spoke in front of a TV camera. His dark, handsome face was coldly implacable as he said: "They wanted *apartheid* when they were in power; we see no reason to believe they have changed their minds. They wanted *apartheid*—very well, they shall continue to have *apartheid*!"

His image and his voice, picked up by the camera and mike, were transmitted by cable to the beam broadcaster in the old capital of Pretoria. From there, it was broadcast generally all over South Africa; at the same time,

it was relayed by tight beam to Satellite Nine, which happened to be in the sky over that part of the Earth at that time.

Satellite Nine, in turn, relayed it to all the other satellites in line of sight. Satellite Two, over the eastern seaboard of North America, picked it up and automatically relayed it to the big antenna on top of New York's Circum-Global Communications Building.

There it was de-hashed and cleaned up. The static noise which it had picked up in its double flight through the ionosphere was removed; the periods of fading were strengthened, and the whole communication was smoothed out and patched up.

From the CGC Building, it was re-broadcast over the United States. A man in Bismarck, North Dakota, looked at the three-dimensional, full-color image of the President of South Africa, listened to his clear, carefully-modulated words, and said: "Serves 'em right, by George!"

BESIDES the world-wide television news and entertainment networks, CGC also handled person-to-person communication through its subsidiary, Intercontinental Visiphone. If the man in Bismarck had wanted to call the President of the Union of South Africa, his visiphone message would have gone out in almost

exactly the same way, and the two men could have talked person-to-person, face to face. (Whether the President of South Africa would have accepted the call or not is another matter.)

From all over the world, programs and communications were picked up by the satellites and relayed to the CGC Building, where they were sorted and sent out again.

The man in charge of the technical end of the whole operation was a short, stocky, graying man named MacIlheny.

James Fitzpatrick MacIlheny, Operational Vice-President of Circum-Global Communications, was one of those dynamic men who can allow their subordinates to call them by a nickname and still retain their respect. His wife called him "Jim"; his personal friends called him "Fitz"; and his subordinates called him "Mac." He knew his own job, and the job of every man under him; if one of the men slipped up, he heard about it in short order, but, on the other hand, if the work was well done, he heard about that in short order, too. MacIlheny was as free with his pats on the back as he was with the boot a little lower down. As a result, his men respected him and he respected them.

MacIlheny liked his work, so he was quite often found in his office or in the monitoring rooms

long after his prescribed quitting time. On the evening of 25 March 1978, he had stayed overtime nearly four hours to watch the installation of a new computer unit. As a matter of cold fact, since the day was Saturday, he needn't have been in the office at all, but—well, a new computer isn't put in every day, and MacIlheny liked computer work.

It was exactly 1903 hours when the PA system clicked on and an operator's voice said: "Is Mr. MacIlheny still in the building, please? Mr. MacIlheny, please call Satellite Beam Control."

MacIlheny stood up from the squatting position he had been in, handed a flashlight to one of the technicians standing nearby, and said: "Hold this, Harry; I'll be back in a minute."

The installation crew went on with their work while MacIlheny went over to a wall phone. He picked it up and punched the code number for Beam Control.

"This is MacIlheny," he said when the recog signal came.

"Mac? This is Blake. Can you come down right away? We've lost Number Four!"

"What happened?"

"Don't know. She was nearly overhead, going along fine, when we lost contact all of a sudden. One minute she was there, the next minute she was gone. We've lost the beam, and—just a sec-

ond!" There was a pause at the other end, then Blake said: "We just got a report from some of the ground stations within range. Satellite Number Four has quit broadcasting altogether—there's no signal from her at all!"

"I'll be right down," MacIlheny snapped. He hung up the phone and headed for the elevator.

IT WASN'T GOOD. Number Four, like the other satellites, was in a nearly circular orbit high above the atmosphere of Earth. She should follow a mathematically predictable course, subject only to slight variations from the pull of the other satellites and the pull of the moon, plus the small perturbations caused by the changing terrain of the Earth beneath her. She'd have to be badly off course to be out of range of Beam Control.

The elevator dropped MacIlheny down from the computer level to the monitor and control level. The men at the monitor screens didn't look up from their work as MacIlheny passed, but there was a feeling of tension in the air. The monitors knew what had happened.

To the man in Bismarck, North Dakota, or the housewife in Tampa, Florida, the disappearance of the satellite meant nothing more than a slight irritation. If the program they were watch-

ing happened to be one that was shunted through Number Four, their screen had simply gone dark for a moment. Then, with apologies for "technical difficulties beyond our control," another program had been switched into the channel.

For the businessman in San Francisco and the government official in New York, the situation was worse. Important intercontinental conferences were cut off in mid-sentence, and vital orders were left hanging in the air.

For seven transcontinental stratoliners, the situation was almost tragic. The superfast, rocket-driven, robot-controlled ships, speeding their way through the lower ozonosphere, fifteen miles above the surface of the Earth, were suddenly without the homing beams they depended upon to guide them safely to their destinations. Their beam-detection instruments went into a search pattern while alarm bells shattered the quiet within. Passengers in the lounges and in the cocktail rooms looked suddenly wide-eyed.

On one of the ships, there was a near panic when one fool screamed: "We're going to crash! Get parachutes!"

Not until the flight captain caught the hysterical passenger on the chin with a hard right uppercut and explained that every-

thing was in good order did the passengers quiet down. He didn't worry them by explaining that there were no parachutes aboard; at eighty thousand feet of altitude and a velocity of over forty miles per minute, a parachute would be worse than useless.

Each of the stratoliners had to be taken over by the flight captain and eased down manually.

MacIlheny had a pretty good idea of what was going on all over the United States, and he didn't like it. He pushed open the door of the Beam Control Section and strode in. Blake met him halfway across the room.

"Nothing yet, as far as contact goes," he said. "We've heard from the spotter station in Topoka; they missed it at the same time we did—1702 hours, two seconds."

MacIlheny glanced at the chronometer on the wall. The satellite had been missing for nearly four minutes now.

"Get the Long Island Observatory; tell 'em to keep an eye peeled for Number Four. It ought to be out of Earth's shadow," MacIlheny ordered. "And start a sweep search with the radar. Cover the whole area. Get a prediction from the Orbit Division; find the cone of greatest probability and search it carefully. Unless the damned thing just blew up, it's got to be up there somewhere!"

"I've already called Orbits," Blake said. "I'll get Long Island on the line." He headed for the phone.

MacIlheny went over to one of the control boards and looked over the instruments. He swept his eyes across them, reading them as a group, in the same way an ordinary man reads a sentence. Satellite Number Four had vanished, as far as the Beam Controls were concerned. Data from the electronic brain indicated that the acceleration of the satellite had been something terrific, but whether it had slowed down or speeded up was something the brain couldn't tell yet.

A thin, sandy-haired man at a nearby board said: "What do you think, Mac?"

"There's only one thing could have done it, Jackson," MacIlheny said. "A meteor."

"That's what we figured. It must have been a doozie!"

"Yeah. But which direction did it hit from? If it hit from the side, Number Four will be twisted around; its new orbit will be at an angle to the old one. If it overtook the satellite from behind, the additional velocity will lift it into a newer, higher orbit. If it was hit from the front, it'll be slowed down, and it may hit the atmosphere."

"Not much chance of its being overtaken," Jackson said. "A meteor would have to be hitting

it up at a pretty good clip to shove Four ahead *that* fast!"

"Right," MacIlheny agreed. "And meteors just don't travel that fast in that direction."

"No—no, they don't."

MacIlheny felt a sense of frustration. The satellite was gone, vanished he knew not whither. It had disappeared into some limbo which, at the moment, was beyond his reach. Until it was located, either visually or by radar, it might as well not exist.

There was actually nothing further he could do until it was found; he couldn't find it himself.

"What's our next contact?" he asked.

"Satellite Number Eight. It'll be coming over the horizon in—" Jackson glanced at the chronometer. "—in eight minutes, twenty-seven seconds. We'll just have to hold on till then, I suppose."

MacIlheny thought about the stratoplanes he knew were up there. "Yeah," he said tightly. "Yeah. Just wait."

CHAPTER II

FOUR MINUTES came and went, while MacIlheny and the others smoked cigarettes and tried to maintain a certain amount of calm as they waited.

At the end of the four minutes, the phone rang. Blake, who was nearest, answered.

"Yes. Good! Okay, thanks, Dr. Vanner!" He cradled the receiver and turned to MacIlheny. "The Observatory. They've spotted Number Four. She's slowed way down and dropped. They're feeding the orbit figures to Orbits Division now, by teletype. She evidently hit a fast meteor, head on."

MacIlheny nodded. "It figures. Tell Orbits to feed us a computation we can sight by—feed it directly into the Brain first, so we can get things going. We've got to get that satellite back up where she belongs!"

As the figures came in, it became obvious that the orbit of Number Four had been radically altered. Evidently, a high-speed, fairly massive meteor had struck her from above and forward, slowing her down. Immediately, the satellite had begun to drop, since angular acceleration no longer gave her enough centrifugal force to offset the gravitational pull of the Earth. As she dropped, however, she picked up more speed, and was able to establish a new, different orbit.

With this information fed into it, the electronic brain in the top twenty floors of the CGC Building went smoothly to work. Now that it knew where the satellite was, it could again focus the beams on her. Since the direction and velocity of the artificial moon in her new orbit were also

known, the trackers could hold the beam on her.

MacIlheny rubbed his chin with a nervous forefinger as he watched the instruments on the control board come to life again as contact was re-established.

Meanwhile, Orbits Division was still at work. In order to re-establish the old orbit, the atomic rocket engines in the satellite would have to be used. Short bursts, fired at precisely the right time, in precisely the right direction, would lift her back up to where she belonged. It was up to Orbits Division to compute exactly how long and in what direction the remote-controlled rockets should apply their thrust.

As the beams again locked on the wayward satellite, MacIlheny kept his eyes on the control board. Lights flickered and rippled across the panel; needles on various meters wavered and jumped. MacIlheny watched for several seconds before he said:

"Blake! What the hell's wrong there?"

Blake watched a set of oscilloscopes, four green-glowing screens which traced and re-traced bright yellow-green lines across their surfaces. His dark brows lowered over his eyes.

"We can't get anything to her, Mac. She's dead. Either that meteor hit her power supply or else it did more damage than we thought."

"No control, then?"

Blake shook his head. "No control."

MacIlheny frowned. If the remote controls wouldn't work, then it wouldn't be possible to realign the orbit of the satellite. "Keep trying," he said. Then he turned from the control board, went to the phone, and punched the number of the Orbits Division.

"Orbits Division, Masterson here," said a gruff voice from the other end.

"This is MacIlheny. How does that orbit on Number Four look now?"

"We've got it, Mac. I'll send the corrective thrust data to the brain as soon as—"

"Never mind the corrective thrust," MacIlheny interrupted impatiently. "We can't use it yet. We don't have any positive contact with her; she's dead—no response to the radio controls."

"You mean you can't get her out of that orbit?" Masterson's voice was harsh.

"That's exactly what I mean. She's stuck in her new orbit until we find some other way to change it. It can't be done from here."

There was a pause at the other end, then Masterson said: "Mac, I hate to say this, but you've got a hot potato on your hands. That thing's in a cometary orbit!"

"Cometary?"

"That's right. Instead of a normal, near-circular path, she's going in an elongated ellipse. At perigee, she'll be less than a hundred and fifty miles above the surface."

"Uh!" MacIlheny felt as though someone had slugged him. If the satellite went that low, the air resistance would slow her even more before she broke free again. Each successive passage through the atmosphere would slow her more and more until she finally fell to Earth. If she fell into the ocean, that would be bad enough; but if she hit a populated area. . . .

FORTUNATELY, by that time her velocity would be considerably cut down; if she were to hit the atmosphere with her present velocity, the shock wave alone would be disastrous.

"Okay," said MacIlheny at last. "Notify every observatory within sight range of her orbit! Keep a check on her every foot of the way! We'll have to send up a drone."

"Right!" There was a subdued click as Masterson hung up.

MacIlheny turned. Blake was standing beside him. "I've got White Sands on the line, Mac."

MacIlheny flashed an appreciative grin. "Thanks, Blake." He went to Blake's office and closed the door. In the screen of the visiphone, he saw the face of Paul

Loch, of Commercial Rockets, Inc., White Sands.

"How's it going, Mac?" Loch asked. "I understand you're having trouble with Number Four."

"It's worse than just trouble, Paul," MacIlheny told him. He carefully explained what had happened.

Loch nodded. "Looks rough. What do you figure on doing?"

"How much will it cost me to rent one of your RJ-37 jobs with a drone robot in it?"

"Fully fueled?" Loch thought a moment, then named a figure.

"That's pretty steep," MacIlheny objected.

Loch spread his hands. "Actually, it's just a guess; but I'm pretty sure we won't be able to get insurance on her for something like this. What do you plan to do?"

"I want to take an RJ-37 up there to Number Four and use it to put the satellite back in a safe orbit. It'll have to be done quickly or we'll lose the satellite and a few thousand square miles of Earth."

Loch paused again, turning the idea over in his mind. MacIlheny said nothing; he knew how the mind of Paul Loch worked. Finally, Loch said: "Tell you what; get the Government to underwrite the insurance, and we'll give you the RJ-37 at cost. Fair enough?"

MacIlheny nodded. "Get her



ready. If the President won't okay the insurance, we'll have to pay the extra tariff. We absolutely can't afford to lose that satellite."

"It'll be ready in half an hour," Loch promised as he cut off.

MacIlheny began punching the code numbers for Washington, but the phone rang before he was through.

Pure luck, MacIlheny thought to himself as the President's face came onto the screen.

"Evening, Fitz," said the President of the United States.

"Good evening, Mr. President."

"Fitz, I understand you're having a little trouble with one of your satellites. The Naval Observatory tells me it's in a colli-



sion orbit of some kind. Where will it come down?"

MacIlheny shrugged. "I don't know, sir. It'll depend on how much resistance it offers to the atmosphere at that altitude, and that will depend on how badly it was torn up by the meteor."

"I see. What do you propose to do?"

"I'm going to try to get one of Commercial's RJ-37's up there to put her back on course. I don't want to lose a twelve-million-dollar space station."

"I can understand that, but—" The President looked off his screen suddenly as though someone had attracted his attention. "Hold the line a minute, Fitz," he said. And the screen went blank. MacIlheny waited. When the President came back, he wore a frown on his face. "The French government has been informed of what has happened. They want to know what we intend to do."

"Did you tell them, sir?"

"Not yet, but I will. But there are going to be other governments interested pretty quickly. Nobody wants something like that falling down on their heads. We may have to send up a hydrogen bomb and blow it out of existence if you can't get it back into a safe orbit."

"I know." He paused. "Mr. President, I have an idea. Suppose we load the RJ-37 with a

thermonuclear warhead. If we can't change the orbit of the satellite, we'll blast her."

A slow grin spread across the face of the Chief Executive. "Very neat, Fitz; it'll also mean the government will have to underwrite the full insurance cost of the RJ-37 if you have to detonate the bomb."

MacIlheny grinned back. "It will, at that. But don't worry, Mr. President; I won't set off the warhead unless I absolutely have to. I want to save that satellite—not destroy it."

"All right, Fitz. I'll call White Sands and authorize the whole project. And I'll try to keep the foreign governments happy."

"Fine, sir. We'll know more after her first passage through perigee. If her orbit changes too much—"

"I'll leave it up to you, Fitz. Good luck."

THE SPECIAL CONTROLS for remote operation of the RJ-37 were in a room just off the main monitors. It was set up just like the control cockpit of the ship itself, with all the instruments in their proper places. If a pilot moved a control knob here, the same knob would move the same amount in the ship. Instead of the heavy paraglass window in the nose of the ship, the control room in the CGC Building had a

wide, three-dimensional color TV screen. It gave the illusion of actually being in the ship.

The remote control cockpit was occupied by a Space Service officer—a Major Hamacher, who had been ordered up from a tour of inspection at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He was a square-faced, clear-eyed, prematurely graying man in his early thirties.

MacIlheny was relieved when he saw the major; the officer looked as though he could do the job. MacIlheny had wanted to use one of the Company pilots, but the President had vetoed that idea. If the ship was going to be insured by the government, then piloting it would be the government's job, too.

It had been nearly an hour, now, since the accident which had disabled Satellite Number Four. She had been carefully tracked by several observatories across the face of the Earth, and the figures had been carefully checked and rechecked.

Lower and lower the satellite dropped, as it spun around Earth in its elongated orbit. At a hundred and fifty miles altitude, the air is thin—thinner than the air in any but the very best vacuum tubes. But it is still dense enough to slow down anything traveling as fast as the satellite. The slight friction would be enough to alter the course of the flying moon.

Major Hamacher sat in the

control chair, his hat off and his sleeves rolled up. As soon as the satellite started up again and her new orbit stabilized, the major would take off the RJ-37 and guide it to Number Four.

The men waited tensely. MacIlheny gnawed impatiently at the stem of his pipe, which had gone dead minutes before without his noticing it.

They waited. Very soon, now, Number Four would hit perigee.

It never did.

The observatories saw what happened. As the satellite came lower and lower, it looked as though it were following a perfectly normal path. Then, quite suddenly, there was a flare of light from beneath her! She leaped up again, under the driving thrust of her underjets.

Number Four had—somehow—changed her own orbit before the tenuous atmosphere could even begin to drag her down.

CHAPTER III

AFTER a few short bursts which lifted the satellite up into a higher orbit, the jets stopped. The artificial moon went on coasting innocently around the Earth.

"Well — I'll — be — damned!" said MacIlheny softly. The others, either silently or verbally, agreed with him.

"Get a reading on that new

orbit!" MacIlheny snapped after a moment. Blake was already on the telephone.

MacIlheny turned to Major Hamacher. "Be ready to take that bird up as soon as we get orbital readings and bearings. There's something screwy as hell going on up there, and I want to find out what it is! Those jets shouldn't be working at all. What could have turned them on at exactly the right moment?" He was talking more to himself than to the major, who was busily making last-minute adjustments on the instruments.

The computations on the new orbit came in, were run through the computers, and then fed into the autopilot section of the remote controls for the RJ-37.

"Any time you're ready, Major," MacIlheny said.

The major adjusted his controls, threw a switch, and pressed a stud.

Over two thousand miles away, in White Sands Spaceport, New Mexico, the atomic-powered, fully armed RJ-37 squirted a tongue of white-hot flame out of her rocket motors, climbed into the air, and launched herself toward space.

Over Major Hamacher's shoulder, MacIlheny and Blake watched the screen that showed the scene from the forward port of the space rocket.

For a while, there was nothing

to see. As the ship gained altitude, it burst through a layer of low-hanging clouds, then there was nothing but the blue sky overhead. Gradually, as the air thinned, the sky became darker, more purplish. Stars began to appear, and finally the ship was in the blackness of space.

The major's hands glided smoothly over the controls, guiding the ship along its precalculated orbit, slowly overtaking the runaway satellite.

At first there was nothing to see—only the distant, fixed stars, glittering like tiny shards of diamond against a spread of blackest velvet. Then it became apparent that one of the shards was moving with relationship to the others. It became brighter, bigger. Then it was no longer a point of light, but a globe of metal floating in the infinite darkness of space.

Under the careful manipulation of Major Hamacher, the remote-controlled RJ-37 moved cautiously up to Satellite Number Four. As the details of the globe came into focus, every man in the room gasped involuntarily.

"What the hell is *that*?" asked Blake.

No one answered. It was obvious to everyone there that whatever it was that had crashed into Number Four and driven it off course, it was most certainly *not* a meteorite.

AT LAST, MacIlheny said: "I'll be willing to bet my last dollar that that's a spaceship of some kind."

From a gaping hole in the side of the satellite, there protruded a long, cigar-shaped shaft of bluish metal. It looked almost as though someone had shoved a fat blue cigar halfway into a silver tennis ball.

Major Hamacher said softly: "I wonder what kind of metal that ship is made of?"

"Yeah," said MacIlheny, "I wonder."

It was a good question. The steel hull of the Number Four had crumpled and torn like cardboard around the hole where the impact of the ship had melted and volatalized the metal. But the hull of the alien spaceship wasn't even dented.

"What now?" asked the major.

"Take the RJ-37 in carefully, and lock on with magnetic grapples," MacIlheny ordered.

Blake glanced at him. "What if the pilot or crew of that ship is still alive?"

"They probably are," MacIlheny said. "But we've got an H-bomb in our ship; if they try anything funny. . . ."

"What makes you think they're alive?" the major asked as he eased the ship in.

"Somebody set off the atom jets when Number Four ap-

proached perigee," MacIlheny reminded him.

The RJ-37 approached Number Four closely, then the magnetic grapples were turned on, and the ship stuck to the hull of the battered space station with a metallic clank. The RJ-37 was only a few yards from the edge of the gaping hole that had been torn in the hull of the satellite. In front of them loomed the queer blue shaft of the alien ship.

"Okay, hold it," said MacIlheny. "Let's see what happens next. Surely they felt the jar when the ship landed." Forcing himself to be calm, MacIlheny struck a match and fired the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe.

THEY DIDN'T have to wait long. From the edge of the hole, there suddenly appeared a moving shape. It was a manlike figure clad in a brilliant crimson spacesuit. The helmet was a dark purple, and it was difficult to see the head within.

"Looks like a man," said Blake.

"Not quite," MacIlheny said. "Look at the joints in the arms and legs. He's got two knees and two elbows."

"What's that he's holding cradled in his arms?" Blake wondered.

The major grunted. "Weapon of some sort. Look how he's pointing it straight at us."

For a full minute, the figure stood there, for all the world as though he were on the surface of a planet instead of on the outer hull of a space station. Then, slowly, it lowered the thing in its hands. When nothing happened, the figure put the weapon down on the steel hull at its feet and held its oddly double-jointed arms out from its body.

"Wild Bill Hickok," breathed Blake softly.

"Huh?" said the major.

"Hickok used to say: 'I'm a peaceable man.' I guess that's what this guy's trying to say."

"Looks like it," agreed MacIlheny. "I wish there were some way of signaling him."

"We've got the spotlights," suggested the major.

MacIlheny shook his head. "Leave 'em alone. We couldn't make any sense with them, and our friend out there might think they were weapons of some kind. I don't know what that thing he laid down will do, but I don't want to find out just yet."

The alien, his hands still out from his sides, walked slowly toward the RJ-37, his legs moving with a strange, loose suppleness. He came right up to the forward window and peered inside—at least, the attitude of his head suggested peering; within the dark purple helmet, the features could not be distinguished clearly.

At last, the figure stepped back and started making wigwag signs with his arms.

"Smart boy," said MacIlheny. "He recognizes that the ship is remote controlled. Wonder what he's trying to say."

The alien waved his hands and made gestures, but there was no recognizable pattern. None of the hand-signals meant anything to the Earthmen.

Blake leaned over and whispered into MacIlheny's ear. "Hadn't we better call the President, Mac? He'll want to know."

MacIlheny considered for a moment, then nodded. "Give him a direct beam on what's coming over this screen. Then give me a pair of earphones connected to his office. I want to be able to hear what he says, but I don't want him countermanding my orders to Major Hamacher."

THE ALIEN was still making his meaningless signals when Blake brought in a pair of earphones and clamped them on MacIlheny's head. A throat mike around his neck completed the communication circuit. "Can you hear me, Mr. President?" MacIlheny asked.

"Yes. Your man Blake explained everything to me."

"Got any advice?"

"Not yet. Let's see what happens. By the way, I've given the

impression to the rest of the world that it was through your efforts that Number Four avoided crashing; I don't think we'd better let this leak out just yet."

"Right. Meantime, I'm going to try to capture that lad."

"How?" asked the President.

"Invite him into the ship and bring him back with it."

"All right," said the President, "but be careful."

"He's given up," said Blake, gesturing toward the screen.

The alien had given up his incomprehensible gesticulating and stood with his odd arms folded in an uncomfortable-looking knot.

"Major," said MacIlheny, "open the cargo hold."

The officer looked puzzled, but did as he was told. After all, the President himself had ordered him to obey MacIlheny. He touched a button on one side of the control panel. After four or five seconds, a light came on above it, indicating that the cargo hold of the RJ-37 was open. The alien evidently saw the door swing inward; he hesitated for a moment, then went around to the side of the ship, out of range of the TV camera.

But he didn't go inside immediately. MacIlheny hadn't expected him to; the alien couldn't be *that* stupid. After perhaps half a minute, the alien figure reappeared and strode deliberately back to his own ship. He opened

a port in the side and disappeared within.

Then, quite suddenly, the screen went blank.

"What happened?" snapped MacIlheny.

Blake, who had been watching the beam control instruments, said: "I don't know how he's done it, but he's managed to jam our radio beam! We're not getting any signal through!"

The President's voice crackled in MacIlheny's ears.

"Fitz! Detonate that bomb! We can't take any chances!"

MacIlheny half grinned. "Major," he said, "set off the H-bomb."

The major pressed a red button on the control panel.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, the screen came on again, showing the same scene as before. No one was surprised. By then, reports had come in that the satellite was still visible, still in its orbit. The H-bomb had failed to go off; the signal had never reached the detonation device.

The alien was standing in front of the camera, holding a large piece of mechanism in his hands. On Earth, the thing would have been almost too heavy to lift, but the gravitational pull of Satellite Number Four was almost negligible.

"*He's got the H-bomb!*"

MacIlheny recognized the

President's voice in his ears.

The alien bowed toward the camera, then straightened and went back to his own ship. He clambered up the side of it with magnetic soles as easily as he had walked on the hull of the space station. Near the end of his ship, he opened a small door in the hull. Within was utter blackness.

Working slowly and deliberately, he pushed the H-bomb into the blackness. It wasn't just ordinary darkness; it seemed to be an actual, solid wall, painted deep black. As the bomb went in, it looked as though it were cut off abruptly at the black wall. Finally, there was nothing outside except the two detonating wires, which had been clipped off from inside the Earth ship. The alien took the wires in his hands.

"My God!" said the major. "He's going to blow up his own ship! Is he crazy?"

"I don't think so," said MacIlheny slowly. "Let's see what happens."

As the two wires came in contact, the black wall inside the small door became lighter, a pearly gray in color. There was no other result.

"Well I'll be damned," said Blake in a low, shocked voice.

The alien closed the door in the side of his ship and came back down to the camera. He bowed again. Then he pointed to

the weapon that he had been carrying and waved his hands. He picked it up and brought it around the RJ-37. From the microphones inside the ship came a faint scraping sound. Then the alien reappeared in front of the ship. His arms were empty; he had put the weapon inside the open cargo hold.

"A fair trade is no robbery," Blake said softly.

The alien bowed once more, then turned on his heel and walked back to his ship. This time, he got inside and closed the door. Then the blue ship moved.

Slowly, like a car backing out of a garage, it pulled out of the hole in the satellite. Nowhere on its surface was there a mark or a scratch. When it was finally free of the satellite, it turned a little, its nose pointing off into space. A pale, rose-colored glow appeared at the tail of the ship, and the cigar of blue metal leaped forward. To all intents and purposes, it simply vanished.

"That," said the major in awe, "is what I call acceleration."

"HERE's the way I see it, Mr. President," said MacIlheny several hours later. "When he cracked up by accidentally plowing into Number Four, something happened to his energy supply. Maybe he was already low, I don't know. Anyway, he was out of fuel."

"What do you think he used for fuel?"

"The most efficient there is," said MacIlheny. "Pure energy. Imagine some sort of force field that will let energy in, but won't let it out. It would be dead black on the outside, just like that whatever-it-was in the alien's ship. He just set off the H-bomb inside that field; what little radiation did get out made the field look gray—and that's a damned small loss in comparison with the total energy of that bomb."

"You know, Fitz, I'm going to have a hell of a job explaining where that bomb went," said the President.

"Yeah, but we've got his gun or whatever in exchange."

"But how do you know our technicians will be able to figure it out?"

"I think they will," MacIlheny said. "Their technology must be similar to ours or he wouldn't have been able to figure out how to fire the jets on the satellite or how to set off that bomb. He wouldn't have even known what

the bomb was unless he was familiar with something similar. And he wouldn't have been able to blank out our controls unless he had a good idea of how they operated. They may be a little ahead of us, but not too much, and I'll bet we have some things they haven't."

"The trouble is," the President said worriedly, "that we don't know where he came from. He knows where we are, but we don't have any idea where his home planet is."

"That's true. On the other hand, we know something about his physical characteristics, while he doesn't know anything about ours. For instance, I doubt if he'd be happy here on Earth; judging by the helmet he wore, he can't stand too much light. He had it polarized almost black. Probably comes from a planet with a dim, red sun."

"Well, Fitz, when they do come, I hope it's for trade and not for war."

MacIlheny grinned. "It won't be war. Don't you remember? We've started trading already!"

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INFINITY has a new address: 11 West 42nd Street, New York 36, New York. That's where to send all manuscripts, letters and the like in the future. You can send money there, too, if you want to subscribe and be a Monster of Distinction. \$3.50 for 12 issues, if you live in the United States, its territories and possessions, or Canada; \$4.50 if you live elsewhere. It's a wise move!

Infinity's Choice



by DAMON KNIGHT

SF, THE YEAR'S GREATEST SCIENCE-FICTION AND FANTASY, edited by Judith Merrill. Dell, 35¢; Gnome, \$3.95.

As near as I can judge, this collection actually does contain all but about three of the first-rate science-fiction stories published in 1956. This is a compliment to Miss Merrill's expert and painstaking winnowing job; but it also makes you stop and think about what she had to winnow from.

To put it another way, she got two-thirds of all the first-rate stories: that is, six. Six stories, plus three is nine—out of the total output of twenty magazines over a period of a year. (The other three, incidentally, are not here because (a) two of them were snapped up by *F&SF* for its own annual collection, and (b) two—not the same two—are by authors already represented.)

It may be that science fiction, which looks so flourishing, is coming to the end of its cycle. I crib this notion from Walter Kerr, who thinks our disillusionment with technological progress has already doomed our present

theater, with its naturalistic conventions and its preoccupation with ideas drawn from science.

Maybe the same thing is happening to science fiction. Of the 15 stories in this collection, three are "upbeat" in tone—"The Far Look," by Theodore L. Thomas, "Silent Brother" by Algis Budrys, and Zenna Henderson's wonderful "Anything Box." The rest range from the mild, almost cheerful pessimism of Mack Reynolds' "Compounded Interest" to the unrelieved gloom of my own "Stranger Station."

Our future, as depicted in these stories, is one in which a little old lady makes the world safe for silliness ("The Cosmic Expense Account," by C. M. Kornbluth); some aliens from the remote past cause a wholesale slaughter at a zoo, in the process getting themselves killed by lions and eagles ("The Man Who Liked Lions" by John Bernard Daley); an alien artifact terrifies a country doctor who can't stand the idea that the universe is larger than our planet ("The Doorstop" by R. Bretnor); a man finds his rapport

with a monstrous alien so painful that in struggling against it he kills them both ("Stranger Station"), and so on.

The point is not so much that the people in these stories come to sticky ends; I'm used to that. But never before have the futures imagined by sf writers seemed to me so thoroughly and unvaryingly dismal.

A little of this goes perhaps a longer way than we have been realizing. All right, our confidence in the future has slipped a little, for good reasons, in the last decade; all right, science fiction is among other things a literature of escape and of protest: but surely we don't have to bang the same drum all the time.

(I have been writing gloomy stories for years, in a reaction against the silly convention that ruled in the magazines when I was a pup, that all stories must have happy endings. But I think a convention of gloom is just as silly as the other one, and you may expect me to turn optimist just as soon as I can retool for it.)

Last year, as Miss Merrill notes in her summation, many of the stories had a common paranoid theme—the solitary hero in flight from a hostile world. This year, interestingly enough, there is a concentration of stories—four of them—built around the theme of multiple personalities.

(Miss Merrill insists on calling them "split-personalities," following a popular misconception. Multiple personality is entirely different from schizophrenia, or "split personality"—the first is very rare, the second is the most common mental disorder.) In Thomas's "The Far Look," two men come back united in mystic brotherhood from a tour of duty on the moon; the same thing happens to a shipload of interstellar explorers in Budrys' "Silent Brother." In that story, the protagonist discovers that he has a "silent brother"—another intelligence inhabiting his body, who comes to conscious life when he sleeps. In Sturgeon's "The Other Man," exactly the same situation is dealt with in a fascinatingly different way; but in each, and in the Thomas story, and in my "Stranger Station"—where the mystic-brotherhood experience is supposed to happen, but doesn't—the message seems to be: *union is painful, oneness is bliss.*

What made four sf writers work so hard simultaneously at this theme, and exactly what it signifies, after all, are questions that have no place here, even if I thought I knew all the answers: but it is a fact that, to my taste at least, the best and richest science fiction comes out of these curious group preoccupations. (Sturgeon had a pure multiple-

personality story in last year's collection, by the way—"Bulkhead.")

My favorites this year are "Silent Brother," for its warm human portrait and its superlative technique; Reynolds' "Compounded Interest," a wonderfully fresh and engaging new slant on time travel; "Prima Belladonna" by a new British writer named J. G. Ballard, who combines singing plants, psychogenesis, plant-human miscegenation and a lot of deadpan doubletalk into a misty, oddball story reminiscent of the vanished Venard McLaughlin; Sturgeon's "The Other Man" for his usual pyrotechnic style, and for a new system of psychotherapy that sounds both revolutionary and practical (however, the people are not people, but qualities—"good," "evil," "self-renunciation"—and that bothers me); and finally Zenna Henderson's warm little masterpiece, "Anything Box."

The other stories range from good to fair, beginning with C. M. Kornbluth's "The Cosmic Expense Account," which is wise, witty, funny, bitter and tragic, but ducks one of the hard basic questions of fantasy: "If this could happen once, why not twice?" Thomas's "The Far Look" suffers from a lack of characterization—the two principals have no faces and no individual differences, nor any per-

sonal reactions to each other—but is memorable for its careful, elaborate treatment of survival on the moon.

John Bernard Daley's "The Man Who Liked Lions" has some effective passages of mood-writing, but uses stock sf gimmicks self-consciously and in places ludicrously: "It took time . . . to move along the pathways of time." Aiming at tragedy, it fails to establish sympathy for anyone concerned, and becomes pointlessly unpleasant. Bretnor's "The Doorstop" is a good minor idea, almost completely covered with chintz. "Each an Explorer" is very minor Asimov: a stock plot, treated perfunctorily. "Grandmother's Lie Soap" by Robert Abernathy is whimsy muddled in with science fiction, a dreadful combination that affects me like a fingernail scraping a blackboard.

There is also a rather clumsy essay in future archaeology, "Digging the Weans" by Robert Nathan, which I could have done without, and a satire by Ray Russell, "Put Them All Together, They Spell Monster," which is funny, but no more belongs here than does Randy Garrett's verse parody, "All About 'The Thing.'"

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THE THIRD LEVEL, by Jack Finney. Rinehart, \$3.00.

Except for one novel, *The*

Body Snatchers (Dell, 1955), Jack Finney's work has previously been known only to those sf readers who happened across his stories in the slicks, or in an infrequent anthology. Now Rinehart has gathered twelve of the stories—all but four of them science fiction—to make this volume.

Finney's stories are told in an easy, conversational style, usually in the first person. You begin by listening out of common politeness, and after the first two sentences, you find yourself hooked. The stories he tells are unpretentious, his tone light, sometimes almost humble; but his themes are the big ones of time and loneliness.

"The Third Level" is about a man who finds a stairway in Grand Central Station, leading down to a gas-lit platform where you can buy a ticket for the Illinois of 1894, when "summer evenings were twice as long, and people sat out on their lawns, the men smoking cigars and talking quietly, the women waving palm-leaf fans, with the fireflies all around, in a peaceful world. . . . back there with the First World War still twenty years off, and World War II over forty years in the future. . . ."

Nostalgia is the main ingredient of this story, and of the equally moving "Second Chance," as well as the Civil

War fantasy, "Quit Zoomin' Those Hands Through the Air." Finney's interest in the American past seems genuine; he speaks with loving persuasiveness of old cars, old places and customs.

Finney's people are usually looking for something they can't name or describe—a happier time, a better place. In "Such Interesting Neighbors," playing the field, Finney brings his protagonists from the future to our own peaceful times, when there is "no weapon worth mentioning except the atom and hydrogen bombs, and those in their earliest, uncomplex stages." In "Of Missing Persons," the longed-for paradise is distant in space, rather than in time; and in a mundane story like "Contents of the Dead Man's Pocket," it is not actually mentioned or thought of at all, but Finney's hero, one of a thousand identical big-city Charleys, bewildered by life, caught between romance and ambition, is a man tormented constantly by the sense of it.

Finney touches a nerve in most of us, I think: the baffled, wordless feeling that there must be something better than this.

In most of the time stories, even though the endings may be happy, there is a hint of danger. In the classic "I'm Scared" and in "There Is a Tide . . ." this suggestion becomes more explicit. Finney seems to be saying that

an occasional random slippage of time can help or harm us—but that either way, we are ants in the gears, perilously caught up in something too big for us to understand.

"Behind the News" is a funny but pretty routine fantasy about a meteor metal which, melted into type, turns whatever is printed with it into the truth. "Cousin Len's Wonderful Adjective Cellar" is pure whimsy, as you might expect, and "A Dash of Spring" is a wholly successful attempt (as "Something In a Cloud" is an unhappy failure) at kidding the slick love story while at the same time following its formula exactly.

Some writers' stories suffer by collection: put them side by side, and immediately you see the stale devices, the self-plagiarisms, the bankruptcy of imagination which had gone unnoticed before. Finney's work passes this test triumphantly: his stories add luster to each other.

If you collect science fiction of enduring quality, this book belongs in your library.

∞

SOMETIME, NEVER, *by* William Golding, John Wyndham, and Mervyn Peake. Ballantine, 35¢.

Here are three oddly assorted entertainments by three highly accomplished British writers. "Envoy Extraordinary" by Wil-

liam Golding is a satirical fantasy of what might have happened if an ingenious Greek had invented (a) the pressure cooker, (b) the steamship, (c) the mortar, and (d) the art of printing, in the time of the middle Roman Empire. Golding, whose forte is subtlety, has embedded his joke pretty deeply in a mass of erudition, irony, and well-bred understatement, but it is still very funny, and a shrewder blow at the romantic ideal of Progress than Ray Bradbury's "The Flying Machine."

"Consider Her Ways" deals with a future world in which men have been wiped out by a mutated virus, leaving women to reproduce by parthenogenesis, and to build up a rigid, ant-like society of Mothers, Servitors, Doctors and Workers, each class biologically tailored for its function. Wyndham drops a representative young 20th century woman bang into the middle of all this by way of a soul-liberating drug called chuinquatin, and pits her against a cultured lady of the time in an argument that may give you pause: If the women of the future are happy and secure in their stable, peaceful world, what exactly have they lost, in losing romantic love? The story is beautifully written, fully realized in a way that few sf stories since Gernsback have been.

"Boy In Darkness" is a cu-

rious episode in the life of Titus Groan, the central character of two long Gothic-fantastic novels by Peake. Titus, here simply referred to as "the Boy," is the heir of a gigantic, nine-tenths deserted castle in a gloomy, decaying, tradition-ridden land. Very little happens to him, or to anybody in these stories, but Peake's lavish Victorian prose builds up memorable impressions of dusty gloom, of silence and decay. A painter and illustrator by profession, Peake uses words more for their colors than for their precise meanings. The results are sometimes awkward, always verbose, but ever and again, like a man sloshing paint together at random, Peake gets striking and unheard-of combinations. This time, in his only outright fantasy to date—it is subtitled "The Dream" in this collection, and Peake seems to have meant it as that—he achieves images that are perfect nonsense, and yet will chill your blood as you read.

∞

TAKE ME TO YOUR PRESIDENT by Leonard Wibberley (Putnam, \$3.50) is mock science fiction, and is mentioned here only to warn you against it. The story is a very mild and much protracted farce about a simple Yorkshireman from a village called Mars, who by a series of circumstances too painfully unlikely to mention, gets himself

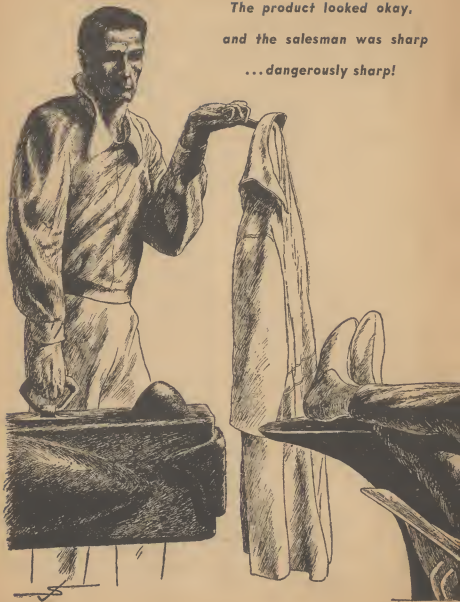
transported by rocket to the U. S. where, mistaken for a real Man From Mars, he masterminds a Big Three Conference and brings about world peace. The author's views on politics and similar matters are vintage 1933, his style is barely above the juvenile level, and what he knows about rockets could be inscribed handily on the head of a pin. The story has some unassuming virtues, but is not by any definition science fiction: caveat lector.

∞

ADVENT PUBLISHERS, 3508 North Sheffield, Chicago 13, Illinois, have issued as their second publishing venture a Frank Kelly Freas portfolio—17 black-and-white illustrations lithographed on heavy stock, with a two-color cover, \$1.50. I am a Freas fan, but no portfolio collector; if I were, I think I might still not go very hard for this one. Unlike Finlay and Bok, Freas seldom does full-page, self-contained, decorative art. His drawings are almost all vignettes, designed to be seen on a page of type. Of those reproduced here, only one, the illustration for Thomas N. Scortia's "Sea Change," with its hundreds of meshing gears, has the fine detail to satisfy those who are hypnotized by difficult pen-work. Some early drawings are downright sloppy, and should never have been reprinted at all.

∞

*The product looked okay,
and the salesman was sharp
...dangerously sharp!*



The Statistomat Pitch

by CHAN DAVIS

Illustrated by JOHN SCHOENHERR



The Statistomat Pitch

by Chan Davis

THE LITTLE SALESMAN buzzed into my hotel room exactly at 10. He must have been waiting in the corridor, ambushing the second-hand.

I watched from my deep chair in the corner while he slid open his raincoat, lifted it neatly off his back (the casual shrug wasn't his style), and stood with it hanging from his forefinger. With a bright, apologetic smile he hung it up in the alcove behind the door. I decided not to object to his using the hook without asking; it'd just slow things up.

The salesman smiled again, ducked out into the corridor and back in with a flat 24x20 brief case and a large, oddly shaped suitcase. His presentation charts and a mockup of the computer, obviously. More apologetic faces, and he sat down.

He said, "It was *very* good of you, Mr. Borch, to give me this chance to tell you about our new, personalized Statistomat. I know you're a busy man—"

I raised my drooping eyelids just enough to see him properly.

"—with all your responsibilities, and I hope I'll be able to answer all your questions on

modern estate planning. That's what I'm here for!" He smiled as if he were pausing for questions, but he didn't pause.

He intoned, "The man of wealth has a special responsibility in our society. He is the trustee of invested capital, on which our economy rests. His proud charge is to direct and build his holdings wisely; and natural economic laws have justly placed the nation's considerable estates in the hands of men equal to the charge.

"At the same time, such men owe themselves freedom from deprivation. And they owe themselves a financial plan adapted to their own—er—preferences and tastes in freedom from deprivation. This is why we speak of *personalized* estate planning. Maybe this will be still clearer, Mr. Borch, if we look at an example."

HERE WE GO AGAIN, I thought, as he hauled a packet out of his brief case, opened it out into a little stand on the table, and flipped up the first chart.

"Take the case of Robert Jones, who inherits \$25,000,000 from his father. The inheritance

taxes are all taken care of by investment-incentive deductions, so Mr. Jones has \$25,000,000 in liquid assets to invest."

Right on the ball, I thought. The hypothetical 25 million was just about twice the publicly known size of the Borch estate, therefore right in the league he could figure I'd like to be playing in. And the hypothetical Jones on the chart, confidently facing the future, was handsome and dignified, but not *much* more so than I was.

"Mr. Jones has a wife and one young son." They appeared beside him on the second chart, and they looked very pleasant. The salesman knew Jed Borch was unmarried. "He has planned to his satisfaction a way of life appropriate to his standing." On the next chart the Jones family was backed up by a half-acre bungalow, a lake, and wooded hills.

"His desire is for security, to ensure this pattern of living to himself and his wife, and to his son. His personalized Statistomat plans his finances accordingly." On succeeding charts, Jones changed only in subtle lengthening of the firm lines in his face, his wife didn't change at all, but his son sprouted to a six-footer and the bungalow grew some too. A bar graph superimposed on the picture kept track of the investment. By the time the boy

was full-grown it had risen to a modest \$100,000,000.

"On the other hand, consider Michael Thompson. Starting with the same sum of \$25,000,000, he may just as legitimately view different goals. Mr. Thompson is unmarried, and has not yet chosen to what station he will aspire." Chapter Two of the charts had just as admirable-looking a man (different color hair). I was curious how much Statistomat would finagle for him, but not curious enough to sit through another dozen charts. When the salesman said, "Naturally he's willing to risk—" I interrupted:

"I don't want any risk. Can't afford to." I smiled slyly. "Responsibility to society."

"Of course, of course, but you might be willing, like Mr. Thompson, to—er—look beyond the more accepted channels of finance for the sake of the larger returns that can be realized by breaking new ground, as it were—participating in pioneering enterprises."

"Oh, sure. Don't want to miss any bets."

SO FAR you couldn't see anything to complain about in his pitch, considering it alongside the pitch for General Computers' Incomac. In fact it essentially *was* a General Computers pitch, with the brand name changed. Let's

get to the point, I thought. I pointed to the odd suitcase. "Uh . . . what's that?"

He was adaptable enough to give up the Michael Thompson story and open up the suitcase, promptly and proudly.

"Oh, the computer," I said, almost encouragingly.

But he didn't let that stand. "No," he admitted, "this is just a life-size facsimile of the new Statistomat. I'm afraid the real thing is too valuable and too heavy for me to carry around, even to such an important interview as this."

"How heavy?"

"I'd say about ten times as heavy as this one," he evaded neatly. "Now on this facsimile I can illustrate the ideas we've been developing. Here, you see this screen and these knobs. I'll turn this switch on and we can watch this part of it just as if this was the real computer."

My surprise was genuine. His demonstration mockup was a live one. I wished my brother could see it.

"On this screen we record your time-dependent utility function. For your convenience, the input is mechanical, but from this point on all the Statistomat's computing is performed digitally."

I said, "Huh?"

"Time-dependent utility function," he repeated brightly.

"Oh, I can't be bothered—all that technical stuff—leave it to specialists," I muttered, making the trap nice and inviting.

But he knew he had to explain. "Naturally only the essentials need *your* personal attention," he said smoothly. "You express in the time-dependent utility function your financial policy—the broad, overall outlines of the course you want to steer. This must come from you. This makes the difference between a Robert Jones and a Michael Thompson. You have a possibility of doubling your investment in a year, let's say. How certain do you have to be of it before you prefer it to a more conservative investment? Even odds? Six to four? Or we might ask a similar question about a ten-year period. You see the point."

"Uh . . . but it depends on how much I've got." I kicked myself. My brother would not approve my helping the salesman along like that.

"Ah, yes! Certainly! When you have a hundred million, an extra million won't seem nearly as important to you as when you have twenty-five. We understand! Our technical expression for this is that the value of money to the investor is not a linear function of dollars. Logarithmic, some say—but that depends on the investor. Whatever relationship you select as a matter of fiscal

policy. That is a part, a critical part, of the information which you give the Statistomat when you work out your time-dependent utility function, or risk function, as we call it for short."

"No risk! Can't afford risk!"

"Mr. Borch, I speak with confidence when I assure you that your estate can be subject to as little risk when its direction is assigned to the Statistomat as in any other way." I almost called him on that, until I reflected that he had really made only one specific claim: that you could feed just as excessively conservative a risk function into the Statistomat, if you were compulsively conservative, as you could into the G. C. Incomac. That might be true.

He went on, "Two of the soundest business research agencies in the country have been invited to inspect all our operations and have okayed us, not once but repeatedly: the S.E.C. and the F.T.C."

Darn right they've checked you, I thought—by law. And don't think they'll stop.

BUT IT DIDN'T do any good to spot a steep slant in his formulations. He was a salesman, after all. Just so he stayed clear of demonstrable falsehoods and "fraudulent tendencies" (as defined by the 1978 Commerce Act), he was within his rights.

He was staying clear. Some of his claims a stickler might want to check up on; but I wasn't going to bother any more to watch for things like that. I thought the stickler would find in each case that he'd been wasting his time. This little salesman seemed awfully good at skating just at the edge. He really knew his profession.

I didn't let my bafflement show. I just looked at him dully and made noises as if I was about to say something. I was, but I didn't know what.

There just had to be something bad about this Statistomat venture. Without (apparently) any new gimmick, a small new company was producing just as good a product as one of General Computers' best-managed divisions. How could Statistomat hope to deliver a normal profit? It wasn't reasonable. There must be badly cut corners, if not in the product then in the sales program or the servicing of customers; or else the investors *weren't* hoping for a normal return. In that case there was something funny in their motives—a long-range scheme to undermine G. C., or something. That might show up in this salesman's pitch.

So I switched to, "How do I know what stocks this thing'll tell me to buy?"

"Not *tell* you to buy," he corrected charmingly, "*buy* you. The

machine can be connected by direct wire to the Exchange's computer."

"Yeah-yeah, but how do I know what stocks I'll be getting? I want General Computers preferred!"

He smiled. "Quite possibly you'll find yourself the owner of a considerable block of G. C. preferred—provided of course your time-dependent utility function dictates a policy which—"

"You mean," I said, with the very suspicious expression my brother always objected to, "you'd let your machine bid for G. C. stock for me?"

"Naturally. The Statistomat has often recommended purchase of G. C. stock. Let me explain to you an aspect of modern firm management which may be so specialized as to have escaped your attention.

"Each firm draws up what is called a preference function. It is somewhat analogous to the investor's time-dependent utility function. It gives exact expression to the objectives of the firm. For any conceivable economic position the firm might be in, it determines, let us say, the weight the board places on a dividend this year as against a larger dividend a year from now, or ten. And so on. It is the criterion for all the optimization computations which pattern the firm's activities.

"Under a 1978 law, every corporation offering stock on the Exchange must publish its preference function. All these preference functions are known to your Statistomat; in effect, it is as if they were all in Statistomat's memory, continuously updated, automatically. Naturally, for a particular kind of investor only certain kinds of stock are suitable.

"But Statistomat does more—and this is the point I think you'll find intensely interesting. After all, more than the firm's policy is important. Two firms may have identical financial policies but very different dividend rates, either due to different degrees of success or to different kinds of partial success. Statistomat also has available to it a sound estimate of the firm's expectations—"

"Who does the—uh—estimating?"

"Based entirely on Commerce Department reports. That's as impartial as you can get, Mr. Borch, and it's also one of the best-informed sources in the country. This information is processed at our home office on one of the largest automatic computers in the world. You see, Statistomat Incorporated is deeply conscious of its responsibility to give flawless service to the men who control and direct America's fortunes."

THE LITTLE SALESMAN sounded overconfident again so I thought I'd shake him up. "What does General Computers use for their whatchamacallit?"

"The General Computers' Incomac uses exactly the same sources of information."

I said in a bored voice, "What do you do different?"

"The principles of investment planning are scientific principles, Mr. Borch, and anybody working in this field must follow them."

Let's hear you desperate, I thought, but my voice just got drier. "Guess I might as well get an—"

"Of course there are differences!"

"Uh—yeah?"

"Oh, yes, yes! You see, even though the principles are the same, still if only one company was offering this service to investors—"

"Then what? It'd jack up the prices?"

But that was over-eager. He backed away immediately: "Certainly not, Mr. Borch. Who could suggest such a thing? We all know General Computers' spotless reputation as one of the most heavily capitalized corporations in the country. Besides, by now we should be free of wild brain-truster theories about the evils of monopoly." He smiled sanctimoniously.

I drawled, "So what if only one company was selling these machines?" My brother would be grinding his teeth at this follow-up. But I thought I just about had this salesman boxed. I'd better! He was catching on.

He answered, "Even though the same principles are applied, there are bound to be individual differences in their application. If all users of estate planning computers had relations with the same firm, all these minor fluctuations would be in the same direction for all of them. Although the investment mixes would be far from identical, they would be more alike than economic principles require. On the other hand, the investor who has the courage to associate himself with an alternate set of analyses may be comparatively alone in the course he chooses. Thus he may benefit, when this course chances to be better than expectations, by having to share the reward with relatively few others."

I had him! I said, "You mean this thing might buy me different stocks from what the G. C. whatchamacallit would?"

"Why, yes, it would be surprising if there was not at some point a difference in the two solutions. That was the point you raised so well—"

"And you mean your answer might make me more money?"

"Why, yes, in the case—that

is, in the way that I was discussing. Mmm-hmm."

"But then you think G. C. gives out wrong solutions."

"Not *wrong*—"

"Solutions that aren't the best—that *means* wrong, huh?"

"Why, yes, I mean, I suppose that—" He stopped.

I SMILED. I dropped my Jed Borch personality (which the little salesman probably much preferred). "You know who you've been talking to?"

"F.T.C.?"

"An F.T.C. Investigator," I said, professionally. Without waiting for him to ask, I showed him my card, with the impressive embossed words across the center: "Fair Trade Corps." Then I pressed a button and instantly two cops were in the door and at the salesman's shoulders.

The salesman said, "What's the charge?"

"You know what it is."

"The charge, please."

I shrugged. "Fraudulent tendencies; to wit, unfair, untrue, and scurrilous maligning of a competitive corporate body, individual, and/or product. Okay, boys."

They handcuffed him and hustled him out without even picking up his luggage and his raincoat. He tried to look confi-

dent, but I thought the law-abiding public wouldn't suffer much longer from the connivings of Statistomat, Inc. I settled back into the deep chair and turned with a triumphant grin toward the door of the room's closet.

It opened. My brother, dressed in the distinctive charcoal-green suit of a General Computers junior executive, stepped out, turning off the tape recorder as he came.

He was grinning too. "You had me biting my lip," he admitted, "but you came through all right. It's a good thing, too. It always gives me a specially grateful feeling when I see society saved from a deviant like that. . . . It's not that there was any danger they would have challenged Incomac's market leadership, but even if they had continued in existence as small as they are now they would have taken away *some* customers. Our responsibility to our stockholders is not just to make profit. It is to make the maximum possible profit—to optimize!"

Of course!

My brother's gaze was distant as his keen mind searched for the deeper lessons of the day's work. He said, "Maybe we should get the public release of those Commerce Department reports discontinued."



LONCON 1957

by **ROBERT SILVERBERG**

September 9, 1957

SIXTY-ODD Americans and several hundred native Britons gathered in London on the week end just concluded to attend the Fifteenth World Science Fiction Convention—the second of the fifteen to be held outside the borders of the United States, and the first World Convention ever held outside the Western Hemisphere.

Science fiction fandom history had been made even before the convention opened—when fifty-five American fans and professionals joined together to charter a commercial airplane for the Atlantic crossing, a project initiated by New York's Dave Kyle. The Yanks descended en masse upon the Old World the evening of September 3 for a three-week stay; among them were such notables as agent Forrest J. Ackerman, former editor Sam Moskowitz, writers Harry Harrison and Robert Abernathy, and

numerous well-known fans, including Dave Kyle and his bride of two days, the former Ruth Landis.

Several other Americans reached the shindig independently: Guest of Honor John W. Campbell, Jr., and his wife, writers H. Beam Piper and John Victor Peterson, and this reporter. British fans, authors, illustrators, and editors were of course present in profusion as the first day of the convention arrived.

Americans accustomed to the recent fashion of mammoth World Conventions were in for a pleasant surprise. The Fifteenth Convention was held at the hundred-room King's Court Hotel. The entire hotel was taken over by fandom for the week-end. The atmosphere was intimate, the spirit (and spirits) congenial. Peg Campbell (Mrs. J. W. C.) spoke for all the Americans present when she publicly praised the convention committee

for the warmth with which the visitors had been greeted and the gaiety that prevailed throughout their stay.

The intention of the committee was that the convention should be unique in another respect—the program was to start on time. This commendable ideal proved difficult of practical realization, despite valiant efforts.

Officially the convention opened on Friday, September 6, after several days of preliminary wassailing. In a brief opening session, Convention President John Wyndham and Chairman Ted Carnell called the gathering to order and introduced Guest of Honor Campbell, Transatlantic Fan Fund delegate Robert A. Madle, and several members of the convention committee. An evening of convention-type socializing followed.

Those delegates awake early enough the next morning were treated to a taped jazz concert. The convention luncheon took place Saturday afternoon. Americans pained by the astronomical tabs at the last few conventions found the price of admission here (13/6, or \$1.90) as delightful as the food (roast duckling). After the luncheon the halls were thrown open to all who cared to hear the speakers. The American delegates had the novel experience of drinking a toast to the Queen, proposed by

John Wyndham; luncheon speakers following him included Ted Carnell, John Brunner, Sam Moskowitz, Arthur C. Clarke, Forric Ackerman, and others, including Lars Helander of Sweden and Rainer Eisfeld of Germany, who expressed messages of greetings from the fans of those countries. Highlight of the session, of course, was the talk delivered by John W. Campbell, Jr., serving his third term as a convention guest of honor and celebrating his twentieth anniversary as a science fiction editor.

An auction session and a lecture on Britain's first planetarium, to be opened shortly, were evening features. At this time representatives of England's two rival TV outfits, BBC and ITV, arrived to film the goings-on; the BBC men had such a good time that they were still on hand, albeit groggily, at 5 a.m.!

Toward late evening fans in weird garb began to appear; it was time for the annual masquerade ball. Prizes for outstanding costumes were divided equally between the hemispheres; Mr. and Mrs. Frank Dietz and Mr. and Mrs. Dave Kyle, New Yorkers all, joined Anglofan Norman Weedall and the team of John Brunner and Marjorie Keller in the winners' circle.

After a particularly rousing all-night party session, the wearying

conventioners assembled on Sunday for an afternoon of fan activity. First came the Ceremony of St. Fantony, a medieval-style affair in which ten select fans were initiated into the Order of St. Fantony; in swift order came three well-conceived amateur films done by various English fan groups, and a remarkable demonstration of hypnotism by Anglofan Harry Powers. The three 1957 Achievement Awards were presented at the evening session: John Campbell's *Astounding* once again captured the award for Best American SF Magazine, with *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Infinity*, and *Galaxy* close behind. *New Worlds*, edited by Ted Carnell, was chosen top British SF Magazine, while *Science Fiction Times* again took the fanzine accolade for Jimmy Taurasi and Ray van Houten.

More fan humor followed, this time a taped account of a mythical convention, and then a showing of the unusual animated fantasy film, *Mr. Wonderbird*. Fannish carousing saw Sunday out.

Monday, the final day of the convention, was rather a subdued one. At a morning business session the 1958 convention site was uncontestedly voted to Los Angeles, and in the afternoon the program consisted of a panel discussion of science fiction followed by a talk by John Camp-

bell on psionics. Writer Eric Frank Russell also put in an appearance.

And so the Fifteenth World Science Fiction Convention faded and took its place in science-fictional history, with plans already afoot for the West Coast doings next September. The American attendees, by now expert in shillings and pence and beginning to grow fond of tea and British beer, brought their overseas visit toward a close—their eyes a trifle bloodshot, perhaps, but all of them conscious in a deeper way than ever before of the international nature of their hobby, and all of them grateful to the hard-working Britishers who had made such a good show of their first crack at a World Convention.

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(Ordinarily, "Fanfare" is INFINITY's fanzine reprint department. The convention report you have just read, however, was written especially for us by Bob Silverberg, and has not appeared elsewhere before.)

(In future issues, we will return to our usual policy of reprinting worthwhile material from fanzines whenever suitable items can be found. Suggestions for such items are welcome—and both the author of the item and the person suggesting it will receive tokens of our gratitude.)

OUTSIDE



SATURN

by ROBERT ERNEST GILBERT

*Gangsters were out of
date, and the ice-
sweeper was an unlikely
thing to steal. But Vincenzo
was a streak, so what
else could Henry do?*

Illustrated by RICHARD KLUGA

CHAPTER I

AZIZ RIPPED the radio from Henry's spacesuit and carefully resealed the panel. "Dis'll be the weldin' of ya, kid," Aziz said, crinkling his round, sallow face in an attempt to smile. "Yer name'll be in ever' yap—in our orbit, dat is."

"But what—" Henry tried to say.

"No doubt at all," Vincenzo agreed, cleverly shorting Henry's drive tube.

"I don't—" Henry said.



"Vicenzo figured it right, kid," Aziz said. He gestured with powerful arms too long for his short body. "Ya'll hit dat ole sweeper square on the bulb. Vicenzo's a streak."

"I'm a genius," Vicenzo admitted. He smoothed the black bangs covering his forehead to the eyebrows, and he fingered the pointed sideburns reaching to his chin. "You jump into space, Henry, and then we'll increase velocity and sink into the Rings."

Aziz begged, "Do us a blazer, kid. We won't go far. Too low on fuel." He lowered the helmet over Henry's bushy, blond hair and ruddy face and clamped it shut.

Vicenzo and Aziz left Henry in the airvalve and closed the inner door. When the valve emptied to vacuum, Henry reluctantly lowered the outer door and stepped to the magnetized platform.

Henry stood twenty meters above Ring B of the Rings of Saturn. Below him, balls of ice, metal, rock, and assorted cosmic debris flowed slowly past with stars occasionally visible between the whirling particles. To either side, the billions of tiny moons blended with distance to form a solid, glaring white band. Henry bent his knees and dived into space.

Holding his body stiff with a practiced rigidity, and cautiously

moving arms and legs to check any tendency to tumble, Henry glided above the Rings. Turning his head, he saw exhaust spurt from the collection of spherical cabins, tanks, and motors that was the spaceship; and the craft moved from his line of sight, leaving him alone.

Henry drifted above a flat surface more than sixty-six thousand kilometers wide. To his left, Ring B extended to the black circle of the Cassini Division which separated it from the less brilliant Ring A. To his right, the gleam of Ring B abruptly changed to the dimness of the Crape Ring through which the surface of Saturn was visible. Of the giant planet, forty-three thousand kilometers away, Henry saw but half a crescent marked with vague white and yellow bands and obscure spots.

Red and green lights blinked ahead. Most of the approaching ice-sweeper was shadowed and invisible against the blackness of space. Henry saw no lighted windows, but he experimentally aimed his signal torch at a dome on top of the space station.

Moving with the exact velocity of the Ring, the sweeper, a bundle of huge cylindrical tanks bound together with fragile girders, apparently grew larger. A rectangular snout, swinging from side to side and probing into the Ring, dangled below the front of

the sweeper. Dancing in mutual gravitational attraction, the tiny moons constantly closed the open lane behind the snout.

Henry blinked his torch and saw its red reflection in the sweeper's observation dome, but no one answered the signal. Gaudy with lights, the station drifted past below Henry's level and nearly one hundred meters away.

HENRY STRUGGLED futilely in his suit and tumbled through space. He saw the flaming arch of the Milky Way and then the immense shadow of Saturn stretching black across the Rings. Somewhere, the bright exhaust of a distant spaceship streaked across the stars.

By missing the ice-sweeper, he would continue on a spiral course down toward Saturn, until he at last fell into the methane; or, if his falling body accelerated enough, he might establish an orbit closer to the planet and revolve around it, until he died of thirst. Vincenzo and Aziz would never find him and would probably not search long.

Fire shot past Henry's gyrating figure. A thin cable followed the small rocket. Henry's flailing arms struck the cable, and his gauntleted hands gripped the strands. He pulled back the spent rocket, and the missile's magnetic head clanked against

his spacesuit. The lifeline reeled him toward the station.

A hairless, brown, deeply wrinkled face watched Henry from a small window beside an open airvalve. The cable pulled Henry to the muzzle of a rocket launcher. He jerked the magnetic head loose and shut himself into the valve. He slid the inner door open and, weakly kicking his legs, floated on his back into the sweeper.

An old man, the owner of the wrinkled face, stopped Henry from drifting into the far wall of the cramped compartment. The old man wore shorts and a sleeveless shirt, and his shrunken limbs seemed to have no muscles. He drew Henry down to the magnetized deck and removed the space helmet.

"You're just a boy!" the man wheezed in a cracked voice. "Where'd you come from, boy?"

Henry, watching through half-closed eyes, almost said that he was twenty years old. Then he remembered to mutter, "Water."

The old man said, "How'd you get out here? There's been no ships in days. What are you doing here all by yourself? I almost missed you. You'd been on a bad course if I had. Just happened to see your torch twirling around out there. Ain't many people can come that close with a life rocket and not hit a fellow. For a second, I thought the

rocket was going to bust you. Of course, being skillful the way I am, it didn't seem likely, but I—"

"Water," Henry moaned.

"Water? Why sure. How long you been drifting, boy? Must be mighty thirsty. What's your name? I'm Ranjit. I've never got used to people not telling their last names. Of course, even when I was your age, most people called each other by their first names. I can't hardly remember what my last name is. You might not think it to look at me, but I'm 107 years old. Here, let's get you out of that suit and see what kind of shape you're in."

Horizontal and vertical wrinkles formed ragged crosshatching on Ranjit's forehead. His nose and ears were large and grotesque with age. He unsealed the space-suit at the waist and, holding Henry against the deck with one hand, pulled off the top section.

"Water!" Henry gasped. Peeping secretly, he saw that the teletype, near the airvalve, was dismantled, with the parts tied in bunches floating over the empty case. He located the radio above an aluminum desk in the far corner. He could see no visular set anywhere.

Ranjit dragged off the lower section of the suit, leaving Henry resplendent in orange knickers and red blouse. "How do you feel?" Ranjit asked. "What ship

are you from? I don't see how they could just leave you. I'd better report this. They must be looking for you. Funny I haven't heard about it. Of course, the teletype's out of whack. I'm fixing it. I'm handy that way, fixing things. The heater broke down the other day, but I've got it going good now. I've started melting ice again. The tanks were about empty after that last ship fueled up. The *Asteroid Ann*, it was, or was it the *Mimas Mae*? They've both been by lately, but—"

"Water!" Henry pleaded. He had to do something to make Ranjit leave the compartment. He tried to listen for sounds that would locate the other crew members. Holding his handsome blond head in his hands, he sat up. The movement lifted his body from the deck, leaving his metal-soled shoes attached, so that he sat in mid-air.

"Water?" said Ranjit. "If there's one thing I've got, it's water. Let me see, there must be a flask someplace." He rummaged in the netting that covered two opposite walls of the compartment and secured an incredible clutter of weightless tools, books, food cases, clothing, oxygen tanks, spacesuit parts, wire, tubing, and other items. Still talking, Ranjit vanished through an opening almost concealed by the net.

HENRY LEAPED to the radio. He whipped a pair of insulated snips from his pocket and cut through the electric cord in four places. He thrust the severed pieces behind the desk and stood listening. Somewhere, Ranjit continued talking, but Henry heard no answering voices. The only other sounds were the whine of electric motors and the throb of pumps. Henry pulled out a screwdriver and paused as he noticed a sign above the desk. The sign said:

AAAAAAA CCCCC D EEEEE
G H IIIIH LLLL MM NNNN-
NNNNN OO PP Q RR S TTTT
UUUUU

Shaking his head, Henry released the clamps, turned the radio, pried off the back, and stabbed and slashed at the interior with the screwdriver. He replaced the back and returned to his position on the deck just in time.

"—really should," Ranjit continued, walking through the door. "You're lucky I saw you at all. Of course, I'm watchful all the time. Would you believe I've been right here on this sweeper for nine years? Here's some water, boy."

Henry squirted water from the flexible flask into his mouth. Ranjit said, "You ain't as thirsty as I thought you was. How come

you wasn't calling for help?"

"No radio," Henry mumbled. "The drive tube wouldn't work either."

"What were you doing in a bunged-up suit like that? You'll never live to be as old as me if you take such chances. If this station had visular, I'd have picked you up in that, but the company said I wouldn't have no use for it."

"Where is everybody?" Henry asked, pushing himself unsteadily to his feet.

"Everybody who? Are you hungry? How long since you had anything to eat? There's nobody here but me. Karoly and Wilbur both passed beyond, Wilbur just two weeks ago. He was only 94 too. The company's sending some help, they say. I don't see how they expect one man to run an ice-sweeper, even if he is handy like me. This is a dangerous job, although you might not think so. Do you realize, young fellow, we're whizzing around Saturn once every nine hours, four minutes, and twelve seconds? That's an orbital velocity of nineteen point eight kilometers per second! We've got to go that fast to stay in this orbit."

"There's no one else here but you?" Henry said.

"Think what would happen if something slowed us down!" Ranjit exclaimed. "We'd start falling toward Saturn and finally

crash! Meteors are scarce out here, but what if a spaceship came around retrograde and smashed this station head-on? There ain't a thing I can do if it starts falling. Part of it's a ship, but the company took the motor out. All I've got is the flywheel steering gear. The control room's right up there above my bunk."

Ranjit pointed to a sandwich bunk hoisted against the pipes and conduits that crisscrossed the ceiling in abstract patterns. He said, "I can spin this sweeper like a top, if I want to, but I can't accelerate it." He squinted through the small window beside the airvalve. "Speaking of spaceships," he rambled, "there's one out there now. Wonder who it is? There's not a thing on the schedule. Looks like they would've called in."

Moving to the radio, the old man fumbled with knobs and switches and pounded on the cabinet with his fist. "This radio's deader than a asteroid!" he yelled. "First the teletype and now the radio. I'm supposed to report all ships to Titan, but how can I with no equipment? Maybe that's your ship come hunting you. What did you say your name is?"

"Henry," said Henry.

"Henry, huh? My name's Ranjit. I better get up to the big valve. That ship'll be clinching in a minute."

"What does that sign mean?" said Henry, seizing the old man's bony wrist.

"Sign? Oh, there over the desk? I just put that there to confuse people. It's a puzzle that spells out something in an old-time language, Latin maybe. Christian Huygens published that way back in 1655. He used a puzzle while he was checking some more. He was the first man to figure out what was around Saturn. It means something like, 'There's a flat ring that's inclined to the ecliptic that circles the planet without touching it.' Well, let go of me. I've got to see about that ship."

"Just stay here and be calm, Ranjit," Henry said.

"What?"

"Be good, and you won't get hurt."

"Get hurt? What are you talking about, Henry? That's no way to talk to a fellow that saved your life. If it hadn't been for me, you'd still be falling. You were slower than the sweeper. I saved your life!"

Henry blushed in sudden shame and released Ranjit's arm. "Why, why, I—I guess you did!" he stammered.

Henry lived in an era that had been preceded by wars which destroyed more than half the people of Earth. It was a time of rigidly controlled population, highly specialized training, and

constantly increasing life expectancy. Each human life was considered a distinct and invaluable thing. Since the end of the final war, the Crime War, seventy years before, murder had become an obscene and almost meaningless word, and natural death was rarely mentioned. Saving another person's life was considered the most magnificent act that anyone could perform, and almost the only way to become a public hero, since actors, entertainers, policemen, and officials were thought to be no better than anyone else.

"I'm—I'm sorry," Henry said, blushing until he perspired. "I'm all mixed up."

"That's all right, Henry. You were out there a long time."

Something struck twice against the hull of the ice-sweeper. "There's a clumsy pilot!" Ranjit yelled. "I better go see what he's trying to do."

"Wait," Henry said, grabbing the old man's arm again. "I—" He stopped speaking and frowned in confusion. When he considered recent events, he realized that Vincenzo and Aziz, by their inexpert maneuvering, had almost caused him to pass beyond. All of Henry's education, haphazard as it had been, emphasized the belief that a person who caused another to pass beyond could only be regarded with loathing. A person who

saved a life must be treated with eternal gratitude and veneration by the beneficiary.

Ranjit said, "Let's go, Henry! What are you up to? I've had a feeling you ain't exactly zeroed."

"I—I think I should tell you," Henry said.

"Listen. Somebody coming aboard," Ranjit said, jerking his arm from Henry's relaxed grip and facing the doorway in the netting. Henry waited for Vincenzo and Aziz to enter the compartment.

CHAPTER II

TWO PEOPLE entered, but they were not Vincenzo and Aziz. The first was a small, thin man with a long, sad face. He wore a somber black oversuit. The second was a girl no older than Henry.

"Please, Joachim," the girl whispered, "don't antagonize them. Ask about the fuel first."

Henry gaped at the girl, and his face grew hot. Since he had spent his young life among the Moons and Asteroids, never going farther sunward than Pallas, he had seen few girls his own age and none as beautiful as this one. Her hair, dyed in tiger stripes of black and yellow, was parted in the middle and, held by silver wires, extended from the sides of her head like wings. She wore blue hose, silver fur

shorts, and a golden sweater sparkling with designs in mirror thread. Metal-soled shoes too large for her feet slightly marred the total effect.

"High," said the man with the sad face. "I am Joachim, Second Vice-President of the SPRS. This is our Corresponding Secretary, Morna." His deep voice rolled around the compartment as if the lower keys of an orchestrana had been struck.

"Low," Ranjit responded. "I'm Ranjit, and this is Henry. Why didn't you make an appointment? The tanks are about empty, and you may have to wait several hours. What do you feed your atomics, water or hydrogen? It'll be even longer if you need hydrogen. I haven't done any electrolysis today. I wasn't expecting— Look at that girl, Henry! I'm 107 years old, but I can still appreciate a sight like that! I don't see how a homely fellow like you, Joachim, ever got such a luscious girl."

"Ours is strictly a business relationship," said Morna with indignant formality. "We do need fuel, Ranjit. We planned to refuel on Dione, but the moon was not where Joachim thought it should be. If—"

"Later, Morna," Joachim interrupted in a hollow voice. "I have come thirteen hundred million kilometers on a mission, and I intend to fulfill it! I represent the

SPRS. We have written to you, Ranjit, but you have never answered."

Ranjit said, "The SPRS? Oh, yeah, you're the ones are always sending me spacemail. It's about all I ever get, and I appreciate it. I don't get much mail, out here, and I don't see many people. This fellow here, Henry, was the first I'd seen in days. I saved Henry's life, or did he tell you?"

"How wonderful!" Morna exclaimed in awe. "I've never spoken to a Saver before! Think of it, Joachim! Ranjit saved Henry!"

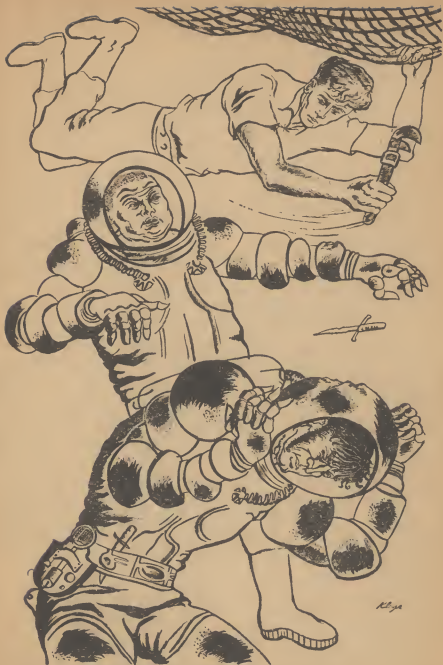
"That is very nice," Joachim admitted, "but—"

"You're a hero!" Morna cried, seizing Ranjit's hands. "How does it feel to be a Saver? It must be sublime!" She turned to Henry and grasped his arms. "How do you feel, Henry? You must almost worship Ranjit! Such a noble man!"

Ranjit cackled. "Look at him blush! I don't believe he's been around girls much. Since Joachim don't have no claim on her, Henry, I'd do some sweet talking if I was your age. I pulled Henry in on a lifeline, or he'd be falling into the methane by now."

"Isn't that wonderful?" Morna marveled, smiling glamorously.

Joachim said, "Everyone be quiet and allow me to finish! I have come thirteen hundred million kilometers on a mission, and



I intend to fulfill it! I am Second Vice-President of the Society for the Preservation of the Rings of Saturn. You, Ranjit, and the people on the other three stations in the Rings are destroying the most glorious and inspiring feature of the Solar System! The divine pinnacle of Creation! A miracle that may be unique in the Universe! You are destroying the Rings of Saturn for the greedy, selfish purpose of selling fuel to spaceships!"

"Spaceships got to have fuel," Ranjit said, "and don't talk so loud. Ice is scarce, you know, unless you want to chase comets. One side of Iapetus has a sheet, and Titan has some. If you go on in, you'll find a little on some of the Moons of Jupiter, and a few of the Asteroids are—"

Joachim said, "You are destroying the Rings of Saturn! This is the most despicable crime in a long history of the devastation of nature by greedy men! When you have eventually melted the last crystal of ice and departed with your hoard, Saturn will spin desolately alone through the night, shorn of his glorious halo that has been the solace and inspiration of man since prehistoric times!"

"Not when they never had telescopes, it wasn't very inspiring," Ranjit said. "I don't see why you're jumping on me, Joachim. I never answered your

letters because there wasn't nothing to say. I just work here. You'll have to talk to the company to—"

"The Saturnine Fuel and Oxygen Company is headed by stubborn men!" Joachim said. "They refuse to consider or answer our demands! That is why I have come to appeal directly to the operators of these ice-sweepers! You must immediately stop sweeping the Rings into your tanks! You must tell your superiors that you refuse to destroy the crowning glory of the Solar System!"

Ranjit said, "They'd just hire somebody else. I don't know as we are destroying the Rings very fast. This was the first sweeper put in orbit nine years ago, and I can't tell no difference in Ring B. There's an awful lot of stuff in the Rings. Some of the balls are solid ice, but some are just ice coated, so we melt it off and throw out the core. Some don't have ice on it, so we throw it back. We don't use hydroponics on the sweepers. We get plenty of oxygen when we take off hydrogen, so we toss a lot of solid CO₂ overboard, too. No, we ain't taking as much from the Rings as you think. They'll get ionic motors to working, one of these days, and it won't take hardly no fuel at all."

"Nevertheless, I believe—" Joachim tried to say.

"You've got a hard hull, anyhow," Ranjit said, "coming out here telling me to stop when you need fuel yourself. Supposing I stopped right now. How would you get away? And what would I do? I got a bad heart. About half of it's artificial. That's why I've been living under zero G for fifteen years. I can't go back to Earth. The docs say more than four-tenths G would do for me. Before I got this job, I was living in a hulk orbiting around Titan, just waiting to pass beyond. Now I got something useful to do and something to live for. I may last till I'm 120."

Henry, who had been stupidly smiling at Morna with too much intensity to follow the discussion, jerked his head around and gasped, "You, you can't stand acceleration?"

Ranjit said, "Not enough to go anywhere. I got a bad heart, a very bad heart. About half of it's—"

Vicenzo and Aziz, spacesuited, crowded into the compartment through the doorway in the netting. "Dis is a stickup!" Aziz announced over a loudspeaker on the chest of his suit.

"Don't move," Vicenzo growled, scowling beneath his black bangs.

SINCE DEADLY WEAPONS were extremely rare and difficult to obtain, the pair had armed them-

selves with long, hand-made knives. Vicenzo also carried a cumbersome rocket launcher, a remodeled lifeline tube.

"Gangsters!" Ranjit wheezed. "I ain't seen a gangster in twenty years! I fought them in the Crime War! I—"

"Shut up, old man," Vicenzo ordered. His sideburns twitched around his cruel mouth. "Everything fixed here, Henry?"

"Are you into this, Henry?" Ranjit said.

Vicenzo snarled, "I told you to shut up!"

"Let me talk to you alone, Vicenzo," Henry said.

"Spill it now. Is this all the crew? Did you smash communications?"

"Yes," Henry admitted. "The old man is the crew. The others just came aboard."

"Why didn't you fix the other ship?" Vicenzo said. "We had to clamp on, because it was blocking the valve. We came through it, and you hadn't even smashed the radio. There might've been a crew aboard, for all you knew."

"Vicenzo's a streak, kid," Aziz said. The short, wide man's sal-low face looked horrible behind the faceplate. "You oughta done like Vicenzo said," he advised. "You won't get nowhere goofin' like dat or— Hey, take a check on the doll! I never thought to see nothin' like dat on a sweep-er! Lucky me!"

"She's not in this," Henry said. "She's from the other ship. Leave her alone, Aziz."

"Don't yap at me like dat, kid," Aziz warned.

Morna, who had stood as if frozen, turned to Henry and squealed, "You're a gangster? How awful, after I thought you were nice, letting Ranjit save your life!"

"Shut up, girl," Vincenzo said.

"A gangster!" Morna shrieked. She slapped Henry twice across the face, knocking his shoes loose from the magnetic deck. He flipped and fell against the net with his feet touching the ceiling.

In the confusion, Joachim broke from his terrified trance and dived through the door. "I'll get 'im!" Aziz roared and, waving his knife, followed the fleeing Second Vice-President.

As Henry struggled to regain an erect position, Morna wailed in his ear, "I thought you were good and handsome, but you're a gangster! You didn't deserve to be saved!" She slapped him again, knocking him to the deck, and began to weep wildly. Under no gravity, the tears spread in a film across her face. Surprised, she stopped crying and wiped her cheeks with her hands. A few tears flew into the air as shimmering globes.

Joachim floated into the compartment. His long chin was

bruised, and he muttered, "Save the Rings!" Aziz, grinning, followed and stood on guard before the door. Morna gasped, darted to her employer, and made helpless gestures.

"All right, now," Vincenzo said. "Let's get this jaunt moving. Henry, tie these cubes up and—"

"We can't do it, Vincenzo," Henry said, staring in horror at Joachim's half-conscious body.

"What?"

Henry said, "It's the old man. His heart's bad. The acceleration would k-kill him!"

"Dat's the chance he's gotta take," Aziz sneered.

"You mean you don't care if you m-murder someone?"

"It's all in the orbit," Vincenzo said. "I told you that when you clinched with us."

"I didn't believe you," Henry said. "You can't hurt Ranjit! He saved my life!"

"Dat's what he was supposed to do, so's ya could get aboard," Aziz said.

"But he really did save me! He pulled me in on a lifeline. I would've missed the station. I wouldn't be surprised if you two tried to m-murder me! I'm checking out. The whole deal's off. Both of you get back in the ship and go! I'll give you that much of a chance. I'll stay here and take Revision, or whatever's coming to me."

"The kid's stripped his cogs," Aziz laughed through his loud-speaker.

Vicenzo aimed his rocket launcher at Henry's midriff. He growled, "Too bad you turned cube, Henry."

"Don't fire that thing in here!" Ranjit yelled. "You'll blow a hole through the hull! What are you fellows up to? I never saw such mixed-up goings on."

HENRY SAID, "They're going to steal the ice-sweeper. That's why I had to be taken aboard, so I could wreck your equipment and keep you from reporting us or calling the other stations. The sweeper is supposed to vanish without a trace. I'm sorry I ruined your radio, Ranjit. I was supposed to try to keep the crew from becoming suspicious while Vicenzo and Aziz were clinching. They're going to move the sweeper into a Sun orbit, somewhere, and use it for a base. They're going to hijack spaceships."

"Of all the crazy schemes!" Ranjit snorted. "You gangsters are space happy! You're ready for the psychodocs! You can't get away with gangstering these days! I fought your grandfathers in the Crime War. I was in the Battle of Jupiter Orbit. We whipped you good, and nearly wiped you out, but, ever so often, a few of you still turn up and try

silly stuff like this. Solar Government will get you!"

Vicenzo said, "Shut up, old man! Aziz, hold the girl. If the rest of you don't behave while I'm tying you, Aziz will stab her."

"Dat'd be a awful waste," Aziz said, twisting Morna's arms behind her back. Morna began to cry again. Teardrops floated like tiny planets.

Vicenzo pulled a long cord from his pack and lifted Joachim with one hand. "Save the Rings," Joachim mumbled. "You are desecrating the glory of the Solar System." Vicenzo lashed Joachim's wrists to an overhead pipe.

Vicenzo said, "All right, Henry, you and the old man put your hands against that pipe."

Ranjit said, "I'm 107 years old, but never in my life—"

"I'm going to shut you up, if you don't do it yourself," Vicenzo promised. He secured Ranjit beside Joachim and then started tying Henry's wrists to the pipe.

"Be careful what you do to the sweeper, Vicenzo," Henry begged. "Ranjit was telling me how dangerous it is. If anything causes the velocity to drop, we'll fall on Saturn."

"You think I'm stupid? That's the way with anything in an orbit. The closer to a planet, the faster you've got to go. Bring the girl, Aziz."

CHAPTER III

MORNA STRUGGLED and kicked the spacesuits while Vincenzo tied her next to Henry. Aziz said, "You think there's really a chance of us fallin'? I'd hate to plop in all that methane."

"No," said Vincenzo. "Old man, where's the control room? We're moving this whole station with the two ships clamped on."

"Hadn't we oughta put some water in our tanks, in case we gotta scram quick?" Aziz asked. "They're about empty."

Ranjit chuckled. "You'll have to wait four hours to tank up. I just got the heater going a while ago. There's an SG ship due in soon. You better give up."

"You're lying in strings!" Vincenzo said. "You must have fuel for the sweeper's motors. Where's the control room?"

"I ain't saying."

"He'll tell," Aziz gloated, raising his knife.

"We can find it quicker," Vincenzo said and turned away. Aziz followed him through the door.

"What?" Joachim muttered. "Where? The gangsters!" He stared around the compartment and cried, "There is one! Henry is a gangster! You are also, Ranjit! I have long suspected that the destruction of the Rings of Saturn could only be the work of gangsters! No one— Morna! Are you injured?"

"No," Morna blubbered. "Stay away from me, Henry!" One of her wings of black and yellow hair had fallen over her face.

"Sorry," Henry said, blushing and moving his legs. "I didn't notice which way I was drifting."

Joachim said, "Where are the other gangsters? Have they gone to steal my ship? It is rented! The SPRS would never recover if we had to pay for the ship!"

"Let's figure some way to get loose," Ranjit suggested. "Those fellows won't find the control room out there. No motors, anyhow, but all they've got to do is wait till enough fuel melts and use their ship to move the sweeper. Think how that'd look on my record."

"You said an SG ship would be here in a few minutes," Morna objected.

"I was just telling them that. There's no ship due for two days."

"You actually told a falsehood?" Morna gasped.

Ranjit said, "When you get to be my age, you'll find you can do lots of things they didn't teach in school. How'd you clinch up with two fellows like them, Henry? They're space happy, both of them. Didn't you have no education?"

"Not much," Henry said. "Me and my parents were shipwrecked in the Asteroids when I was only

ten. Mother tried to teach me Honesty, and Morality, and all the rest, but it didn't take very well. We were there eight years before we were picked up. They put me in school, then, with a bunch of kids. I didn't like it, so I skipped and worked in the mines on Titan. Then I got mixed up with Vincenzo and Aziz. This is the first job I've pulled with them."

"At least you changed your mind and tried to stop it," Ranjit said, tugging at his bonds.

"The snips!" Henry exclaimed. "There's a pair of snips in my side pocket. Maybe you can reach them, Ranjit, if I— No, they're on the wrong side. Morna, will you try to get them if I can put my, uh, pocket next to your hand?"

"Stay away from me," Morna said.

"You've got to." Henry braced his feet against the deck and pushed, bending his knees as his weightless body flew into the air. He twisted, and the side of his left leg struck the ceiling. Shoving with his toe, he forced his contorted body back toward the pipe. "There!" he grunted. "Can you reach them?"

Morna said, "I don't know. My wrists are tied so tight." Her hand touched Henry's hip and sent him swinging in the opposite direction. His legs stopped across Ranjit's chest. The old man

lowered his head and butted Henry back toward Morna.

"Oh, get out of my face!" Morna complained.

HENRY LAY against the ceiling with his legs bent, his back bowed, and his left elbow pressed against his lower ribs. Morna's hand fluttered at his pocket. "I've got— No, it's a screwdriver," she said. "Now, I've got the snips!"

"Don't drop them," Henry pleaded. He thrust his feet back to the deck. "Try to cut the line around my wrist. Ow! That's my hand!"

"Be brave!" Morna jeered nervously. "Now it's under the cord. I cut one!"

Henry twisted his wrist in the loosened cord and pulled his left hand free. He said, "Thanks. Give me the snips."

Morna said, "Promise to cut me down first. I don't want to be tied with you loose."

Henry snatched the snips from her and cut the line binding his right hand. Morna said, "Gangster trick."

"Hurry up, Henry," Ranjit said. "Those fellows will be coming back."

Henry released Ranjit and Joachim. "Cut me loose!" Morna yelled.

"Not so loud," Henry said, freeing her. "Go up in the control room, Ranjit. You told me

you still had flywheel steering. If it won't hurt you, you can make them think you're decelerating. It'll confuse them, at least."

"Yeah," Ranjit chuckled, "that's a bright idea. I was about to think of it myself."

Henry said, "Morna, you go with Ranjit. Joachim, you stay with me, and we'll waylay them. We'll find something for weapons."

Ranjit pulled the sandwich bunk down on its rods, crouched on the bunk, and pushed open the overhead hatch. Joachim said, "I do not intend to engage in a brawl with gangsters. Come, Morna, let us take our chances in our own ship. We—"

"I hear them out there!" Henry said.

Joachim squeaked, bounded to the bunk, and sprang through the hatch. "Bet he bumped his head," Ranjit hoped. "Up you go, Morna. Strap yourself to a couch."

Morna climbed on the bunk and through the hatch. Ranjit followed. "It's a trick," Morna said. "He'll be alone with his gangster friends."

"There's a set of spanner wrenches right there in the net," Ranjit said, pointing. "There's a roll of wire over yonder." He closed the hatch.

HENRY RAISED the bunk back to the ceiling. He fumbled in the

accumulation behind the netting, throwing out a case of canned beans, a one-volume encyclopedia, a bundle of papers, and a broken clock. He found the wrenches and selected a large one half a meter long. He searched again, pulled out a coil of electric cable, and stuffed it under his belt. Jumping across the compartment, he clung to the net above the door.

Vicenzo and Aziz had not turned off their loudspeakers. "Nothing but tanks and ladder-chutes," Vicenzo was saying. "There has to be a control room somewhere."

Aziz said, "Maybe there's another door behind all the junk in there. I'll get it outta the old man."

As Vicenzo's spacesuited figure appeared below in the doorway, Henry swung his arm. The spanner clanged against the back of Vicenzo's helmet. The man tumbled across the compartment into the netting. The rocket launcher whirled from his hands, struck the ceiling, and bounced to the deck.

Slashing upward with his knife, Aziz twisted into the compartment. Henry met the thrust with the spanner and knocked the knife from the squat man's hand. Aziz bellowed, "Ya greasy cube! I'll squash ya!"

Aziz swung his gauntleted fist. Henry struck Aziz across the arm

with the spanner, denting the metal of the spacesuit. Vincenzo jerked his head from a box and roared, "Get him! He busted my skull!"

Henry jumped from the net to the corner beside the desk. The two men slowly stalked him. Vincenzo had his knife, and Aziz experimentally flexed his metal-sheathed hands.

"We're going to fix you, Henry," Vincenzo promised. "You're just a little smarter than you should be."

"He ain't smart atall," Aziz growled. "What for did ya want to turn cube, Henry? I told ya yer name'd be in ever' yap, if ya stuck with us. Now, nobody'll know ya when I get done."

Henry debated with himself, trying to decide if the situation justified a falsehood. He said, "Get away while you can! Ranjit says he'll crash this sweeper before he'll let you steal it! He's in the control room now."

Aziz stopped and glanced around. "Ya think he will?" he asked.

"No," Vincenzo said. He circled to Henry's left.

Henry raised the spanner and kept his eyes on Vincenzo's knife. Aziz moved to Henry's right. The deck seemed to tilt. Henry clutched a leg of the desk to keep from falling.

Vincenzo and Aziz, waving their arms, leaned at an increas-

ingly acute angle. Their boots broke from the magnetic deck. They fell slowly, accelerating at about two meters per second, and dropped into the netted wall which had become the floor.

Henry dangled below what was now the ceiling. Objects fell from the net beside him. Tools, machine parts, books, and canned food slowly showered down on Vincenzo and Aziz, who thrashed and swore in the growing junk heap.

"We're deceleratin'!" Aziz yelled. "That old man really is gonna kill us! We'll crash on Saturn!"

"That hatch over the bunk!" Vincenzo said as he tried to stand. "That's where they went! The control room!" A box of cans emptied over his helmet.

"We're fallin'!" Aziz yelled. "It's forcin' us to the front of the station! Let's get out!" He stumbled through the litter toward the airvalve which was now up one wall.

Vincenzo said, "Look out that window! The stars are streaking! He's just spinning the sweeper! It's centrifugal force!"

"It's deceleration!" Aziz insisted, jumping at the airvalve. The dismantled teletype slipped from its clamps and fell on the man's head. He slid back down the wall.

Beside Henry, the net broke loose. A slow, miscellaneous

rain, including two sandwich bunks and part of a spaceship landing leg, fell on Vincenzo and Aziz. Henry felt the desk slipping. He dropped on his feet in the clutter. The desk clattered down beside him.

STUMBLING and staggering, Henry reached Vincenzo, who struggled under a bunk, a plastic packing case, part of a pump, and a bundle of tubing. Henry took the electric cable from his belt and formed a loop. He drew the loop tight around Vincenzo's arms. Vincenzo pushed the case off his legs and tried to stand. Henry flipped the cable around and around Vincenzo and bound his arms to his sides.

"Get him, Aziz!" Vincenzo called in rage. Henry tied Vincenzo's feet together and cut off the remaining cable with his snips.

Aziz had grasped the frame of the airvalve and was trying to slide the door open. Henry selected a battered oxygen tank from the heap, lifted it in both hands, and hurled it. The missile caught Aziz across the back of his spacesuit. He fell into the jumbled equipment on the floor. Quickly, Henry repeated his looping and tying operations. Then he sat on an empty trunk and tried to slow his rapid breathing.

"Le'me go, Henry!" Aziz demanded, somewhat dazed.

"We're fallin'!" Henry opened the switch on the spacesuit's loudspeaker.

The bunk in the wall that had been the ceiling unfolded, and Ranjit's wrinkled face peeped through the exposed hatch. "What a mess!" he chuckled. "Things wasn't fastened down like they should of been. Of course, it never needed to be before. I never knowed—"

"How are you standing the gravity?" Henry panted.

"It's just two-tenths G," Ranjit said. "Hang on, and I'll take us back to no weight. This old sweeper's spinning like a top."

Ranjit's head withdrew. Henry tried to find a handhold in the pile of material. His feet left the tangle. Accompanied by assorted items, including the bound figures of Vincenzo and Aziz, he floated in the air.

Twisting, Henry placed his feet on the magnetized deck. Objects containing steel settled around him. He pulled Vincenzo and Aziz down, and, as Vincenzo began to curse in ancient terms, silenced his loudspeaker also.

Joachim appeared clutching his stomach. "I shall wait in my ship for the fuel," he gagged, dodging a floating chest, "away from this criminal madhouse!"

Morna and Ranjit dropped into the compartment. Ranjit kicked aside a crate and said, "Good, Henry. I guess you saved

our lives, or mine anyhow. Those fellows would have passed me beyond if they had accelerated the sweeper, and you sure kept them from stealing it."

"He did all right for a gangster," said Morna on her way to the door.

"Wait, Morna, please," said Henry. He blushed a bright red. "Won't, won't I ever see you again?"

"Why would I want to see a gangster again?"

Ranjit said, "He's not much of a gangster, and he changed his mind. Of course, those two will tell about his part in this, and Joachim's sure to report it. SG will ship you to Earth, Henry, for Revision, but that won't be

too bad, just a sort of school, and you're good as Revised already, the way you acted."

Henry looked at Morna. "I'd like to go to Earth," he said.

"Tell you what," Ranjit said. "It'll be three hours before there's enough fuel for Joachim's ship. Why don't you two go up to the dome and see the sights, and forget all this? We'll be passing into the Shadow in about ten minutes, and you'll see one of the prettiest things there is, Saturn from the dark side. The atmosphere looks like a gold rainbow above the Rings."

Morna stared at the deck. The corners of her mouth curved upward. She said, "I'm sorry I slapped you, Henry."

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TALES FOR TOMORROW

Next issue, of course, you'll find the second big installment of Richard Wilson's *And Then the Town Took Off*. It's even funnier than the first half, and it's tremendously exciting, too. No matter how much guessing you do, you'll still be surprised when you learn how and why Superior, Ohio, was suddenly levitated—and you'll feel like levitating yourself as you watch the various forces involved choose up sides and throw punches at each other. Everybody wants to get into the act—and the act becomes an all-star science-fictional comedy!

The rest of the line-up will be all-star, too. There will be a new novelet by Robert Silverberg on a new theme, one that's exceedingly timely as the world grows smaller and we reach for the stars. There will be a titillating story by Robert Sheckley with an unusual kind of hero and a heroine like none you've ever met before; this one might be described as girl-chases-boy—but *what* a girl! And there will be stories by Algis Budrys and others as well. Remember, it's INFINITY, *The Magazine of Tomorrowness*, on sale December 26!

TOMORROWNESS

(Continued from page 53)

dled, or trying to mislead the rest of us, or something?

Mostly, I think these people are looking for something in science fiction that isn't there, never was there, and isn't supposed to be there.

Some of them, having decided that great literature is "better" than science fiction, have drawn a false conclusion from that "fact." And the conclusion isn't just that science fiction ought to be great literature, which would be silly enough. No, what they've decided is that anything that isn't great literature (by their standards) can't possibly be science fiction either.

Sure, it would be nice if science fiction achieved literary greatness occasionally. But does that mean that every story is required to do so, in order to qualify as science fiction?

Silly, isn't it?

Then, of course, there are the "sense of wonder" boys, who have lost something they used to have, and have decided that the lack is in science fiction, not themselves. And the "lost cause" boys—those who used to fight to make science fiction popular and who, now that it *is* popular, have nothing to fight any more and so turn to fighting science fiction it-

self. And the boys who jumped on the wrong bandwagon or the right bandwagon at the wrong time, lost some money on science fiction, and are sore about it. And maybe others I haven't classified yet.

I could go on and on about how wrong they are, but I won't. I'll simply say instead that I can see a very lively science fiction kicking up its heels all around me. I like it, and I think it's wiser to try to kick with it than to go off in a corner and sulk because it isn't all perfect.

Science fiction is still alive and still the best form of entertainment I know. And the best part is, it's going to be even better tomorrow. If it changes, that's only to be expected. We of all people should anticipate and adapt to changes. Change isn't death.

INFINITY will not only try to change with the times, it will try to stay a step ahead of them. It will also try to have fun doing so. And to express this attitude, we've decided to call INFINITY "The Magazine of Tomorrowness."

Tomorrow isn't going to be perfect, but it's going to be better. So is science fiction.

Are you with it? —LTS

Feedback



RE ART COULTER's letter in Oct. INFINITY "Feedback":

So your anticipatory delight turned to anger and disgust when you read Damon Knight's column. Well, perhaps Knight also feels anger and disgust over many of the stories he reviews. And possibly he does keep his critic's razor honed a bit more sharply than other critics do. But surely this may be allowed him as an individual whose *other* traits and capabilities shine so brightly. You will note that he also keeps a keen edge on his sincerity, perception and fluency. Be happy for his obvious talents and fret less over his refusal to become a sweet-talkin' Little Sir Comlocution. Diplomacy and euphemistic sidestepping can become a disease, often ending in the sad prognosis downright hypocrisy.

In view of your apparent desire to get Knight to "Try a little milk of human kindness . . ." some of your phrases are ill chosen. Indeed they appear to partake of those same qualities for which you chide Knight. I refer to: "the boil who writes like a man," and "Knight is no critic. He's God," and "relieving an innate sadism by means of a poisoned pen," and "should be psychoanalyzed." Then you justify such on the basis of simple retaliation. Of course, if getting even is

the main idea why go to it, say it out sharp and clear as is certainly your right. But if you really are concerned to "tone down" Knight's style, I predict complete failure for your present *modus operandi*. Doubtless Knight will simply consider your critical fireworks in the light of a challenge to invent better ones to use in his column! But anyhow, all's well that ends in INFINITY. I like INFINITY and I like Knight's column, *no strings attached*.—Keith Nelson, 1133 Green Street, Marietta, Ohio.

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Latest (Oct '57) INFY at hand. I still don't see the fuss about the Vance story. When I read it I wasn't sure whether I liked it or not, since there was practically nothing to compare it with. Hardly the violent reaction you said we'd get. (*Ab. but I got a violent reaction from the readers; witness the new look in "Feedback."*—LTS) A friend of mine made a point of asking me about the story, and found we had the same feeling. Astra to the contrary, the story *was* science fiction, and Franklin to the contrary, it wasn't a potboiler. Briney calls for comparison with "The Mitr," which appeared in the first issue of the now-dead and

hardly-missed *Vortex*. I looked up my copy of that issue and reread the story. The biggest similarity is in the style, which is one that Vance seldom uses. "The Mitr" wasn't as unsuccessful as all that, and actually it and "The Men Return" aren't too similar outside of stylistic approach.

Interesting that Coulter hollers about knight in the same issue that damon is most kindly disposed to books.

Stories. Now that Kornbluth . . . *that was Kornbluth???* Now this is how you should do things. Instead of playing up stories big with brass bands and infinity-plusses, just put one in quietly and let the reader find out for himself. I was skeptical about the Vance because of the buildup. Cyril's little thing has left me completely shook. (*Not shaken, Larry.*) I don't think he has ever done anything like this before, and I certainly didn't expect to ever see him do it in the future after his announcement last year that he was leaving the field. Kornbluth is a craftsman, and it's wonderful that he changed his mind. As for TLMLITB, it gave me the violent reaction I didn't get from the Vance, but I have to sit on it for a while to figure out what I think.

Beside it, the Wellen attempt in the same vein was pale and meaningless.

Simak's "Death Scene" is most carefully done and sensitive in handling. I liked it.

Wilson's little vignette gives the same effect to me as Matheson's "Witch War," though the subject matter is vastly different.

"Second Census" was all right. Peterson doesn't seem to put much substance into his stories.

The last two of Clarke's six bits are the best of the lot. The fifth one especially. Most of it was a run-of-the-mill boy-girl tale, and I think it was set up that way on purpose to contrast the short climax and the one-line kicker.

Both novelets were good. Garrett is talented enough to turn a worn idea into a decent story.

In sum one of the better issues of INFINITY.—J. Martin Graetz, 307 South 52nd Street, Omaha 3, Nebraska.

∞

I would be very happy if INFINITY could help me with a survey. I am trying to find out what the readers hold are their favorite novels (recent). If they will send me a list of ten, I will tally the results and send them back to you as soon as possible. I am doing this only with INFINITY as I know it has more than enough readers to make this project a success.

Here is my list of ten favorites:

1. *End of Eternity* (Asimov)
2. *The City and the Stars* (Clarke)
3. *Foundation and Empire* (Asimov)
4. *The Stars My Destination* (Bester)
5. *Timeliner* (Maine)
6. *Pawns of Null-A* (Van Vogt)
7. *Eye in the Sky* (Dick)
8. *What Mad Universe?* (Brown)
9. *The Stars Like Dust* (Asimov)
10. *Sands of Mars* (Clarke)

I would appreciate it very much if you were to print this letter.—Michael Solomon, 2441 Laurelhurst Drive, University Heights, Ohio.

∞

Which do I believe? On the cover of the October INFINITY it says now monthly, and good for you if so, but at the bottom of the contents page it is six-weekly.

As for the interior, the best story was Garrett's (by the way, wasn't he on "Twenty-One" a few months ago?) followed by McLaughlin, Peterson, Clarke, Simak, Wilson, and Kornbluth. Wellen was a little shaky this trip. Kornbluth's style was too disjointed and rambling.

Garrett's "hero" did not go quite far enough to make me hate him. In fact I got quite a kick out of him. I liked Emsch's cover, and I still say Leland Hale's likeness is familiar. I am anxious to read the sequel to Mr. Blish's enjoyable travelogue.

Only a couple of paragraphs relating to precognition placed Clifford Simak's story in the science fiction category, but I read it twice anyway.—Bill Murphy, 207 South Andre, Saginaw, Michigan.

∞

Kornbluth's "The Last Man in the Bar" couldn't have sickened me more. I like abstracts and impressionistic writings such as this when they're done well, but this was pure tripe—utter nonsense pouring forth from the deep dank subconscious

of Kornbluth's mind. There was nothing to the story—nothing "grim" and nothing "funny." And before I tried to solve the problem of the hero in this story, I first had to solve the problem of the reader: What the hell is this? Let's hope you don't accept such material in the future, if written by "names" or not.

Completely opposite to the entertainment value of the aforementioned story, "Welcome Home" was an exceptional novelet, the most outstanding asset being the beautiful writing talent of Dean McLaughlin. As so few stories do at the present time, it kept my interest page by page so that the ending came all too quickly. The story calls for a sequel, undoubtedly. (*Undoubtedly.*—LTS)

Wellen's short was short and fairly sweet. Not up to his past writing by any means.

And, ah, this beautiful mood-piece by Simak! That man can *write*! I've never seen an ending brought over with such effect since Clarke's "The Star"! Possibly the best in the issue.

The accompanying illo to "Death Scene" was typical of Orban's work of the early '50s, completely unlike his current work. Hope he reverts back to his earlier and most beautiful style.

The three Clarke shorts were of course highly enjoyed. This series tops Clarke's White Hart series by a long shot and I truly hope that he devotes more time to this sort of writing than to Harry Purvis. Wouldn't it be terrific if Clarke could turn out many more stories

such as this completely describing the exploration of the Solar System and finally the stars? Would be a science fiction reader's dream.

Wilson's "The Enemy" was similar to Wellen's short as it was short with humorous twist ending.

Garrett's "To Make a Hero" could not have been more enjoyed. The plot was minutely worked out, the writing handled extremely well, and the characterization completely without flaw. One of Garrett's very best and I do hope you get many more novelets and short novels from him. He's a real writer.

"Second Census" by Peterson was written humorously but the overall plot was a bit illogical. Wouldn't say "far-fetched" as that is just not a word in the science fiction world but illogical it was. I doubt very seriously if the three men would completely leave their home on which they had spent their entire life to fight a galactic war which they knew nothing about. (*You mean you wouldn't?*—LTS)

I agree with you wholeheartedly on INFINITY's flexibility. To set a certain *type* of story standard would not be smart as good writing can come from all types and of course INFINITY wants only good writing. Keep your standards high when pertaining to good writing and general overall quality, but as for length and themes, set no limit. And this goes for serials, too. And since serials would practically call for a monthly schedule, this is a round-about way of saying Go Monthly which I'm sure you'll do in the near future. Serials will really set INFINITY permanently in the

Big Five if not the Big Three.

I hope you continue the small-type practice in the lettercol. This follows in the tradition of the old pulps which all true fen miss. A lettercol which can fit in more letters will just naturally entice more readers to write, knowing that there is a bigger chance of getting their letters printed. And since the small type guarantees a greater number of letters, controversies can be viewed from all sides with five to maybe ten letters instead of two or three as has been the past policy of "Feedback." Personally, I wish the whole magazine could be printed in this small type but of course that would call for more fiction to be printed which would be all right with the readers but rather hard on the olde budget. (*Hard on the eyes, too.*—LTS)

Art Coulter goes overboard on damon knight and rather hysterically at that. Knight does a fine job of reviewing—a job of reviewing that any other competent reviewer would be expected to do. When he sees a book he likes, he says so; he doesn't condemn everything as one who reads your letter would be led to believe. If he dislikes a book, he says so and unlike most reviewers, he'll give the exact reason *why* which is highly commendable as this shows he knows exactly what he's talking about and can think clearly. With Larry Shaw's permission, I'd like to refer you to a Robert Lowndes editorial of *Future Science Fiction* #32 in which Bob says that criticism is more destructive if you don't speak what you think about the novel; if you go

easy on the author merely for the sake of his ego, you'll make him feel better, and feeling better he'll turn out more books of the same type, which will be just as bad as the book the reviewer was easy on. Criticism of a novel is not to satisfy the critic's own eccentricities but it is to show the author what is *wrong* with his novel and *why*. And damon knight does an excellent job of this, as I'm sure anyone will agree.—Bill Meyers, 4301 Shawnee Circle, Chattanooga 11, Tennessee.

∞

Every story in this issue of INFINITY is good, fairly good, or extra good, but nothing *alarming* with the possible exception of the Kornbluth story. Since it is by Kornbluth, I plan to read it again some bright day of an early hour when my strength is up more. To figure it out better, you know.

Time travel stories are too close to fantasy at best, and it does seem to me that this time Cyril skun too close and went through to the wrong side. I wouldn't fight the point. But if this is science fiction, then it is certainly a nonselling type.

Yet, on this point of what sells and what doesn't: consider the salt of the earth. Almost everybody wants a pinch in the stew. But from too much, you get sick—supposing you can get it down. Hence an all-fantasy magazine is too salty. But all sf has *some* fantasy as an ingredient; and an occasional story like "Last Man in the Bar" is good

fun and added zest. I do like the way you combine a variety of stories into a well-built total, per book.

However, can't you do something about accuracy? Perhaps it is just a necessary weakness to go with all that scope. If so, nobody is entitled to be sore at you about it, and you mustn't be sore at any true friends who tip you off where to lock the barn door after the horse-laugh is out.

Personally, I shall specialize in your artwork, because somebody should. Most of the pix were safe and all were nice looking, but the Emsh job on "To Make a Hero" is a find-the-mistakes puzzle. He has the two men in knee-length robes which the author calls "long" and girdled with twisted ropes vs. author's "braided"; wearing scraggly chintufts in defiance of the author's claim that they wore heavy but neatly-trimmed beards; and whereas in words they wore neatly-combed short-cut hair, in the picture their heads are shaved. The hero is described as decidedly chunky in appearance; the artist knows much better, has drawn him very slim. (*But—Garrett wrote "big," not chunky, and said Emsh had captured Hale exactly when he saw the illustration.—LTS*) Nor is this all? See that coastline sketched in so nicely? Dead ringer for the white cliffs of Dover, eh? But what does the author say, hanh? Page 75, column one, line 3, to wit, "Geologically young, craggy," and do those formations look geologically young to you? For chalk, you have to have a planet with life evolved

a few million years prior, hanh? So maybe those cliffs are coral? Same objection. Or sandstone? That's not a primary rock formation by an era or so either, is it? And no matter what those nice, smooth, eroded cliffs are made of, answer me this: are they craggy?

Here is the Hill Theory on why Fantasy Don't Sell. Like this: if it would be fun if possible, but alas impossible, that's fantasy and a sad basis to proceed on, whereas if maybe it could be so, and if so then what, there we have the science fiction idea. The difference between possibility and impossibility is the difference between a strong selling point and a weak one. None the less, the borderline is often a danged thin one, especially when you consider that in most cases it's still not being done, however plausible and scientific the basis of the big *if*—so that strictly speaking, none of it is possible here and now.

Exploring this demarcation along

its edges, we can see that the question is therefore not whether it's a possible thing or not, but rather whether it's a plausible thing or not. How many people can be persuaded to believe in it—how many want to believe in it. Lots of true things are perfectly implausible.

Another point. Thanks a million for refusing to try to settle any Truths About Flying Saucers. It does seem as if there are so many better things to do than settle questions without any information to settle with. Let one of those things fly up and identify itself, and I'll be in a position to discuss it. What makes folks so anxious to come to conclusions about insufficient information? To me that's just the opposite of science fiction. Science fiction is *frankly* crazy, and that's why I like it. Personally, I buy fantasy too, but then, I'm so far gone that to me, anything's possible.—Alma Hill, 14 Pleasant Street, Fort Kent, Maine.

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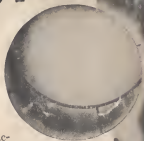
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